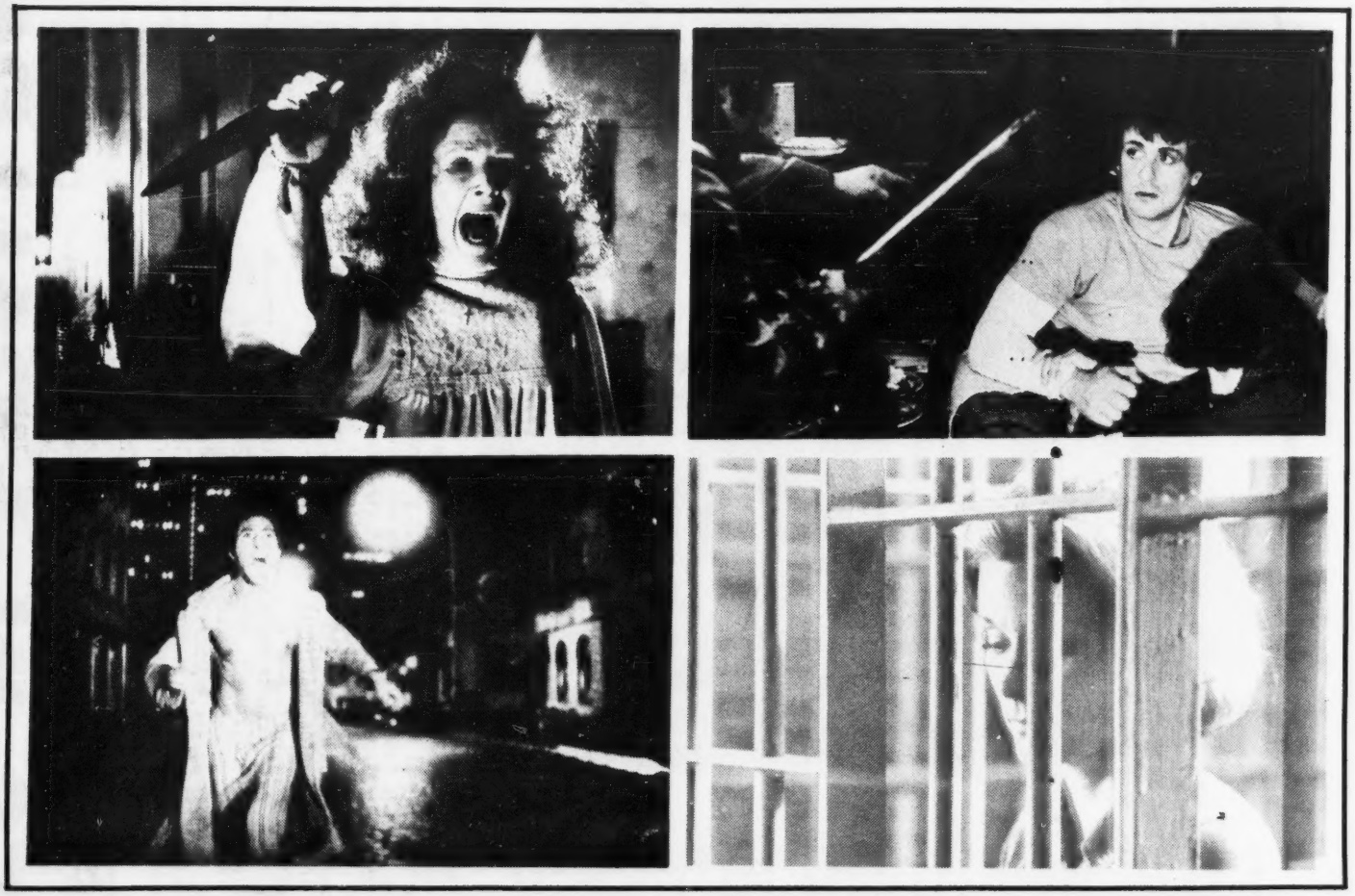
Radical 30's Cinema

JUMP CUT

NO. 14

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY CINEMA

75¢
(Canada $1)



Women, Power, and Violence

ROCKY · *MARATHON MAN* · *UNION MAIDS*
BARBARA KOPPLE INTERVIEW · *CARRIE*
HARLAN COUNTY · EISENSTEIN'S *OCTOBER*

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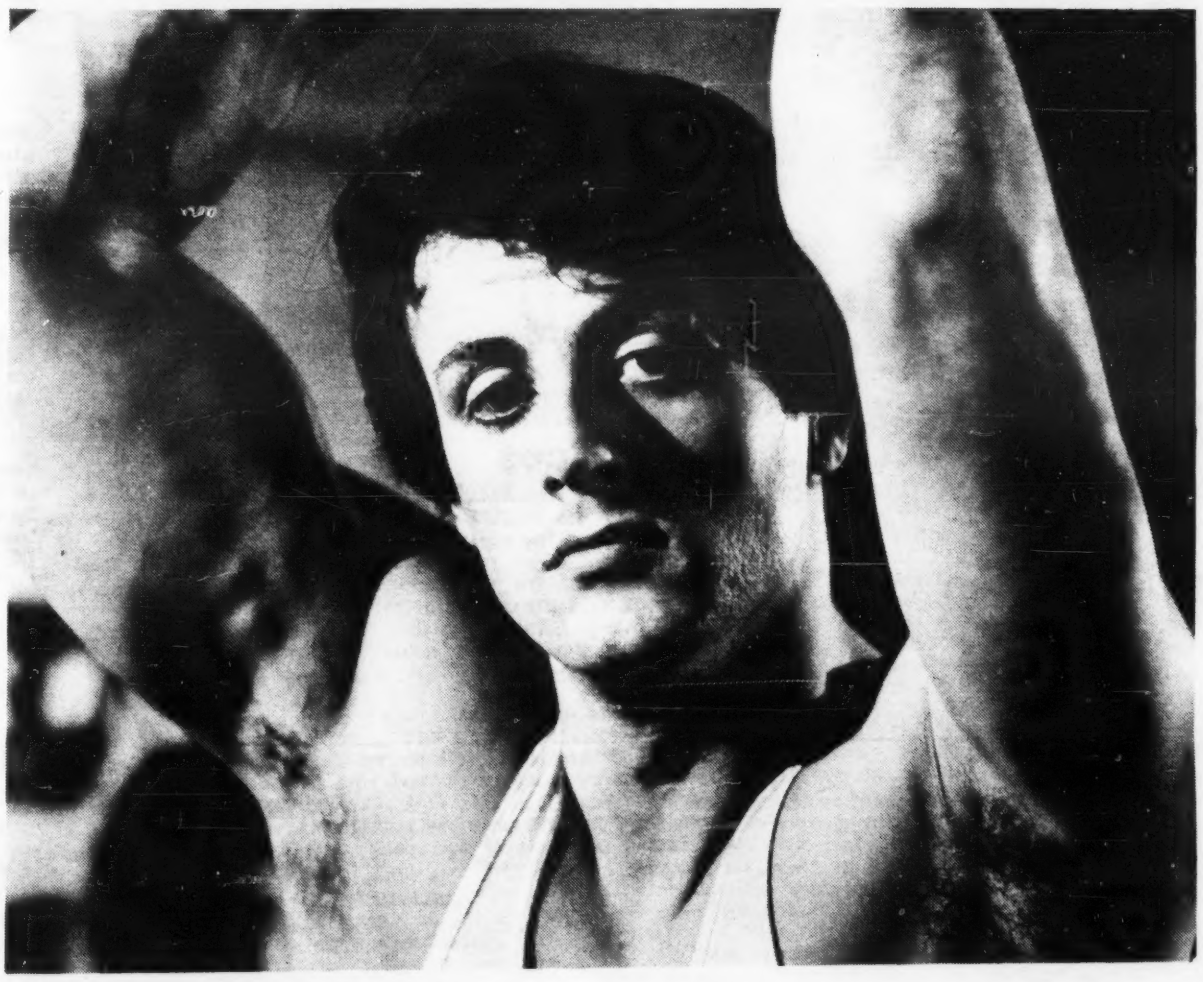
The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a CALL TO ABANDON A CONDITION WHICH REQUIRES ILLUSIONS.

Karl Marx

ROCKY: Two Faces of the American Dream

--Ira Shor



ROCKY is an irresistible and painful movie, curiously divided in its story and effect. At the same time that it explodes some myths about working people, it also traffics in other grand illusions. The film is set in an old Philadelphia ethnic neighborhood, where working people on grimy streets live out dead-end lives. Philadelphia has become the butt of many jokes in American culture, but it is famous for producing such tough heavyweight fighters as Joe Frazier and Jimmy Young. The movie's hero, 'Rocky' Balboa--the Italian Stallion--is an aging and unpromising product of the dismal boxing gyms. Far from fame or affluence, or the green suburbs, Rocky is part of a whole sector of working people left behind by American prosperity. The movie evokes their lives through cheerless half-light. So many scenes take place at night, dawn, dusk, on a cloudy day or indoors, that the final glare of publicity surrounding Rocky seems unreal.

But if no sun shines on Rocky's neighborhood, a romantic star does. The film is a stirring story about the American Dream, a Cinderella epic about an over-ripe boxer with a heart of gold. Rocky gets his crack at the big time, even though he's past his prime. As a working-class hero, Rocky is superbly portrayed by Sylvester Stallone, unacknowledged for his fine performance as the macho leader in THE LORDS OF FLATBUSH. This time, as both actor and screenwriter in what should become a sentimental classic Stallone is very male but less macho, playing a small-time pug and hood. Before his punishing climb ends, lovable but graceless Rocky makes the most of his big chance, and the audience cheers him all the way.

The movie is acted very well, and is an exciting story. In its Cinderella simplicity, the only character given real depth is Rocky. In the working class, Rocky might be known as a "good-natured slob." He is like many such men who are friendly, moral, well-liked, but who can't find dignity or a decent job or even put together a respectable family life. Rocky resists dehumanization even though he lives on the fringe, boxing for peanuts, pushing around overdue debtors for the local loan shark, hanging out in his smelly one-room flat. Tender and even sweet, he's forced to be tough to support even a shabby life. As a working class misfit, he doesn't look for "honest" work. He wants more out of life, but winds up with less than the people around him. Rocky has no choice but to either rise above his class, or sink below it. He's offered no chance to rise with his class, and can't fit into the respectable routines familiar to the working world.

The characters in Rocky's life are sketched in caricature, deep enough only to give Rocky more depth. There is his shy love, Adrien, played admirably by Talia Shire. Adrien is a combination of two female stereotypes: first the wall-flower and then the clinging vine. Next is Rocky's best friend Paulie the butcher, a worker without Rocky's sensibilities, who would be happy to leave the icy slaughterhouse and go to work breaking the bones of overdue debtors. Lastly, Mick, the crusty boss of the gym (Burgess Meredith) serves as a third major foil for Rocky. The redemption of all their empty lives by Rocky's rising star adds emotional tension to the film.

The movie is a lot like its hero, simple and complex, obvious and intricate at the same time. A good example of the story's complicated aesthetics is Rocky's job, collecting for the loan shark. It's ugly work. He knows it, but goes on doing it, even though he won't initiate Paulie into the underworld. We're set up to tolerate Rocky's sleazy job because he can't bring himself to break the thumbs of delinquent debtors. Also, the shark himself is seemingly benign, low-key, and even generous; he gives Rocky money to train for his big fight. Finally, the shark's driver is so hateful that Rocky shines in comparison. So, we soften our judgment of Rocky, who after all doesn't break off with the hoods.

That hoods are not uniformly tolerated in the working class is shown by Mick's violent contempt for Rocky's job. Rocky himself feels guilty, but the movie matter-of-factly portrays how petty crime is just another ugly way of life in a world of dead-end lives. The audience is not asked to approve crime, but just to understand the unglamorous context in which Rocky does it. Moreover, we get a chance to see just how morally superior Rocky is to the sordid world he lives in. The mix of fault and virtue places Rocky in a long line of film anti-heroes, men of conflicted morals and mediocre talent who rise above their limits, and square off against a depraved world far worse than them.

In a society jaded at all levels, Rocky is both a moral jewel and dinosaur. His old-fashioned values include a sentimental love for animals and a fondness for corny jokes. He has a good word to say to street kids singing on the corner, but he delivers a stern, paternal lecture to a friend's teenage sister, about getting a street rep as a whore. Rocky the male fossil cringes at the word, because he doesn't like to talk dirty in front of women. Stallone brilliantly creates a chivalric and gentle Rocky. Watching him radiate in the seedy tenements, we want him to make it. He gets his chance.

In a Bi-Centennial hype, the fictitious heavyweight champ (a tasteless caricature of Muhammad Ali), Apollo Creed, winds up offering a title shot to an unknown fighter. Creed and his promotors stage a lavish patriotic spectacle, as a national demonstration of what the Land of Opportunity still can offer after its first two hundred years. From a catalogue of nobody-boxers, Creed chooses the Italian Stallion, for his colorful name. Rocky has already had thirty of his own years to find out about opportunity for workers, so when he's called into the promoter's plush office, he only expects a few dollars to be a sparring partner for Creed. Then, he turns down the offer of the big fight, feeling too outclassed. Finally, the chance is just too great, and he accepts the magical call.

As the film becomes more of a fable, Rocky's character becomes more symbolic. His identity as a working-class warrior sharpens. His clumsiness overshadows his courage, in the early going. Lumbering, unpolished, and inarticulate compared to Creed and the promoters and the press, who all ridicule him, Rocky suffers self-doubt. He wonders, is he good enough? What's he trying to prove anyway? Why get his face busted for such a hype? The complex of feelings is intricate--injured pride, fear of failure, need for recognition, and resentment at performing by somebody else's rules. Stallone's script captures an authentic psychology of many working class men. Training his way through doubts, Rocky lowers his expectations from fantasies of victory to just going the distance. This movie is one fable with its feet on the ground.

Rocky gives Creed the fight of his life, and in his spectacular display of courage, a lifetime of disgrace falls like an albatross from his neck, replaced by the warm love and admiration Adrien offers. Ending on an "up" note, and exciting all the way, the film makes us cheer Rocky because the audience identifies with a nobody who wins respect and dignity. The movie invigorates feelings of heroism in a cynical time, and it validates honesty and simplicity in an increasingly decadent society. At the same time that the system is judged corrupt, it is also ironically seen as giving Rocky a chance to overcome degradation. Rocky emerges as a working-class hero who answers the sudden call of the American Dream, going from disgrace to dignity in a magical moment. His bruised but handsome face mirrors the two faces of the Dream. Soft-hearted Rocky must hurt people and get hurt himself in order to make it. Opportunity is inseparable from both glory and tragedy, in the damage to oneself and others, up the American ladder to success. Rocky breaks Creed's ribs and Creed breaks Rocky's nose, recording the price each man pays for pride.

Compared to recent working-class heroes, Rocky is closer to Ivan (Jimmy Cliff) in THE HARDER THEY COME, and farther from Travis Bickle (Bob DeNiro) in Scorsese's TAXI DRIVER. All three movies display working-class innocents trapped in violent quests for recognition. Trying to break out of narrow class confines, each engages in dubious battles for pride. However, Rocky's story is the least self-destructive. It is as rich in human relationships and affirmative values as Cliff's in the Jamaican film, and free of the sinister and unrelieved cynicism of the Scorsese movie. DeNiro the taxi driver is applauded socially for his crazed massacre of small-time pimps, in a society seen ready for warped answers to social problems. Ivan gets shot down by the well-armed forces of race and class oppression, on an island riddled with poverty.

But Rocky survives. He will get married, enjoy several years of better-paying fights, collect some more scars along with paychecks, bask in a small limelight until he retires, and live happily ever after with Adrien. The story is such a satisfying fantasy because it speaks to a powerful reality: The good in working people is fighting daily against a depraved society. Our wish to have the best rescued from depravity comes true in the enchanting tale of Rocky Balboa, a man who has to win or lose on his own. ■

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New Prices

As you can see from this issue, we've decided to upgrade the paper we use in JUMP CUT. This change costs money: just about doubling our printing bill, in fact. And the heavier weight of an issue will mean more for postage. So, our expenses will be going up. Because we have no surplus (the staff subsidizes part of every issue) and because our other expenses have gone up too, we've increased our prices according to the following schedule. We've kept the increase as small as possible. All new prices went into effect March 1, 1977. Also, we've been heavily subsidizing our Canadian subs to the point where we now have to make the Canadian rates the same as all other foreign rates. And finally, our bank has again pushed up its charge for handling foreign currency to the point we can only handle US currency. We regret this financial imperialism, and we're working for the day when the postal service and banks are run in the interests of everyone.

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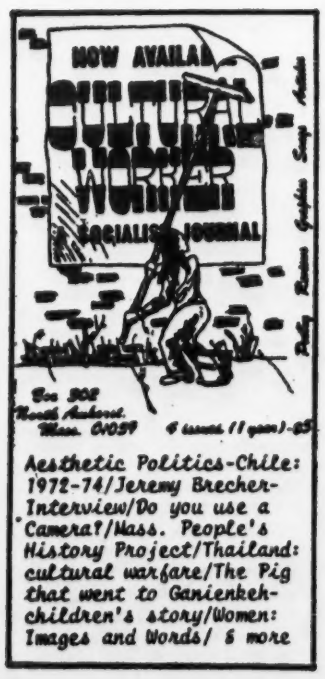
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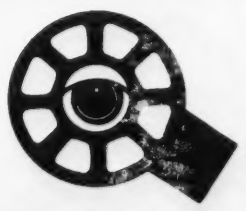

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NEWS AND NOTES

The Visual Studies Workshop has published reprints of every known issue of Photo Notes (Newsletter of the Photo League), along with five issues of Film Front, the newsletter of the Film and Photo League. For further information, write Joe Flaherty, The Visual Studies Workshop, 4 Elton Street, Rochester, NY, 14607.

U. of Pennsylvania's History Dept is offering a 3 week summer course (May 14-June 4) in conjunction with the Cannes Film Festival. It'll cost you about $800, but you'll stay in a chateau, get into most of the festival and receive credit. Write Stuart Samuels, History, U. of Pa., 208 College Hall, Philadelphia, PA, 19174.

According to General Cinema Corp., the world's largest film-theater chain, the theater biz has turned the corner since xmas and is moving up. Some films "have legs" (A STAR IS BORN has steadily increased its audience), some are "sleepers" (SILVER STREAK started real slow but is catching on), and others are "blockbusters" (would you believe KING KONG?).

Bored with the same old leftwing benefits? Well, just plunk down $150 and you can rub shoulders (or whatever) with Washington bigwigs at preview events of the American Film Institute Film Club. So far the Club has raised all of $38,550 "to support educational and special projects," which works out to exactly 257, uh, film buffs.

We forgot to include with Victor Wallis' review of PRINCIPAL ENEMY a note saying that Tricontinental Films distributes the film. Send for their catalogue to 333 Sixth Ave., New York, NY, 10014.

Newsreel now distributes SCENES FROM THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN PORTUGAL, a new feature length color documentary made by Robert Kramer and Philip Spinelli, and a 30 minute Thames Television (England) documentary on South Africa, THERE IS NO CRISIS HERE. Community groups pay on a donation basis; others, inquire. West Coast: California Newsreel, 630 Natoma, San Francisco, CA, 94103. East Coast: 26 W 29th St., NYC, 10011.

More News and Notes on p 36.

JUMP CUT Class

The San Francisco Bay Area editors of JUMP CUT will conduct a class on the current practice of local independent political and especially feminist film and video makers at the East Bay Socialist School, 6025 Shattuck, Oakland, 94609 (652-1756). Each Sunday evening from 8 to 10, beginning on April 24, a group or individual will show and discuss their work.

Several special panel discussions will focus on distribution and exhibition of independent films and on the role of the critic/journalist. The class is open to anyone with an active interest in the production, distribution, use, and analysis of political film and video.

The school's registration fee is $15 and people can register by mail, at open house on Sunday April 17 (1-5 pm) at the school, or by coming to the first class.

Contributors

WILLIAM ALEXANDER teaches English at U. of Michigan in Ann Arbor....Holding onto the firm opinions he expressed in the 1930's, SAMUEL BRODY lives in Southern Calif. and does work with the Socialist Media Group in LA....STEPHAN BARTON is a political activist in San Francisco....SERAFINA BATHRICK is active in the U. of Wisconsin-Madison's Women's Studies Program....JUMP CUT editor, PETER BISKIND, struggles away at Seven Days....RUSSELL CAMPBELL works on his dissertation on The Film and Photo League at Northwestern....While teaching at William James College, MICHELLE CITRON, makes feminist films....LINDA GORDON helps edit Radical America....LEONARD LEFF teaches literature and film at Bellevue (Nebraska) College....Poet, novelist, and teacher in California, MARY MACKEY, is doing research on women and violence in films....JUMP CUT book review editor, GERALD PEARY, teaches at Livingston College, Rutgers.... CHARLES PERKEL writes interesting letters to newspapers.... MICHAEL ROSENTHAL belongs to the collective that operates Modern Times, a Socialist bookstore in San Francisco.... A student at UC Santa Barbara, TONY SAFFORD reads Mayakovsky in his spare time....IRA SHOR teaches on Staten Island and writes on Culture and Education....A student of the Cold War, MURRAY SPERBER teaches and grows grapes in Bloomington, Indiana (Chateau Sperber?)

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HARLAN COUNTY, USA
THE MINERS' STRUGGLE

--Peter Biskind

HARLAN COUNTY, USA, Barbara Kopple's feature length film about a coal miners' strike in Kentucky, is the best American documentary in a long time. The film has its faults. Its editing is ragged; its narrative structure is confusing and begins to unravel towards the end. But its faults are the consequence of its virtues: an energy, immediacy, and passion rarely seen in an American documentary. The film's power comes from Kopple's intimate involvement with the people she filmed, the risks she took, the places--jails, courtrooms, stockholder's meetings--into which she forced her camera. Its strength lies not in its beauty, nor even in its politics, but in the moral authority that is inscribed in every frame.

There is no bloodier chapter in the history of American labor than the struggle of coal miners, and some of the most violent episodes within this chapter occurred in Harlan County, Kentucky. The people who live there remember it as "bloody Harlan," the site of fierce battles between miners and coal companies that culminated on May 4, 1931, in a shootout that left a large number of dead and wounded. The song that fixed this struggle forever in the folklore of American labor--"Which Side are You On?"--plays an important role in the film, both as a constant reminder of the historical continuity of the miners' fight, and as a commentary, of sorts, on the kind of partisan filmmaking practiced by Kopple and her crew.

Things haven't improved much in Harlan County since the thirties. The statistics tell a grim story. Its population, now 40,000, has declined by 36 percent since 1960. More than 24 babies out of every thousand die before reaching the age of one. If they do live long enough to enter school, they will be poorly educated. The expenditure per child on public school is one-half the national average. Only 23 percent of those over the age of 25 have finished high school. Whether they have or not, they are likely to live their lives in poverty. The median family income in Harlan County is $4,600. People have only a 50-50 chance of living in a home with plumbing. Many will not find work. If they do, it will probably be in the mines, where they will die young--most likely of black lung disease.

HARLAN COUNTY, USA documents a strike at the Brookside mine in Harlan County. The Brookside mine is run by the Eastover Mining Company. Until the strike began, the miners belonged to a company union, the Southern Labor Union, whose members were drawn from mines throughout Eastern Kentucky. Contracts varied from mine to mine, with pay scales ranging from $17 to $32 a day, as compared to $45 per day for miners represented by the United Mine Workers of America. Medical and retirement benefits were minimal and unreliable. More important, union officials didn't give a damn about the rank and file. Bill Doan, a miner, told the Citizens Public Inquiry into the Brookside Strike, "If you called someone from SLU, he might come in a week, he might come in two weeks, but when he did come, he'd go into Eastover's office and talk for an hour. Then he'd come out...get into his truck and run."[1]

Conditions at Brookside were particularly bad. In 1971, according to government figures, the accident rate in the mine was three times the national average. There was no safety committee at Brookside, as required by law. The phones in the mine rarely worked. If a man was injured, it took an hour or more to carry him out on the back of a man doubled up in a crouch under the roof of the mine, which was four feet high. You'd be lucky if the roof didn't fall in on you.

Accidents were frequent and serious. Darrell Deaton, a miner, told the Citizens Inquiry that "he was caught in a belt line last year because he had to work alone, without a helper. A shoulder blade and five of his ribs were broken. He'd worked seventy-eight hours straight the preceeding week. It was two o'clock in the morning when the accident occurred, and he'd been in the mine more than twelve hours."[2]

In June, 1973, the miners at Brookside had had enough. They voted 113 to 55 to affiliate with the United Mine Workers. Negotiations with Eastover president Norman Yarborough quickly broke down. On June 30, the miners walked out, beginning a strike that was to last 13 months. It is here that the film begins.

HARLAN COUNTY, USA is about the strike. We don't learn much about what it feels like to work beneath the earth or get much sense of the texture of daily life lived in the shadow of the mine. The film is not an ethnographic study of a quaint community of mining folk. What we do get is images of struggle: picket lines, meetings, face-to-face interviews with UMW militants--which is just about everybody. The film is punctuated by funerals, which become occasions for the miners to express and reaffirm their solidarity with the bereaved and one another. Unlike the Pare Lorentz documentaries of the 1930's or the work of photographers like Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, the film rarely aestheticizes the miners. The one or two shots that do remind us of the iconography of the 1930's--the thin, pinched faces, sunken cheeks, round eyes of men who have worked long and hard for too little to eat, who have seen too little of the sun and known too little joy--merely serve to remind us how far we are from that frozen world of dignified poverty. There are no artfully composed shots in HARLAN COUNTY, USA, none of the silhouettes-against-the-horizon that mar SALT OF THE EARTH. The film's poetry is not one of image but of action, clarity, strength; its eloquence is that of the people within it. What visual beauty the film does have comes almost by accident, from the blue-gray early morning mist that shrouds the pickets gathered by the roadside to block scabs imported by the company to break the strike.

Miners hold off scabs

The miners' demands are simple. They want their own safety committee, elected by themselves, to monitor the federal inspections, which, they say, are frauds. They want the standard UMW average daily wage of $45 computed from "portal to portal," from the time they enter the mine until the time they leave it. Eastover had been in the habit of paying them only for the time spent at the coal face. They want Eastover to pay the standard UMW rate of 75¢ a ton, which will go into medical and retirement benefits. This would cost Eastover $400,000 a year, and Norman Yarborough would rather let the miners fall over dead on the job than retire to a comfortable old age.

The film follows the chronology of the strike, taking time out for two digressions. One deals with the battle within the UMW between the corrupt leadership faction, led by Tony Boyle, and insurgent reformers, led by Jock Yablonsky. Yablonsky and his family are murdered on Boyle's orders, but the election is eventually won by the Miners for Democracy candidate, Arnold Miller. The story of Boyle's defeat is told swiftly, in a few dramatic images. In one scene, Boyle, supremely confident of victory, stares out from under satanically arched eyebrows, telling his audience that his ambition is to be president of the UMW until he reaches the age of 100. In another, Boyle, wrapped in a blanket, is wheeled off to prison, a pathetic invalid, his arrogance lost in the wreck of age and illness. The other digression concerns black lung disease. A doctor holds up a blackened lung, removed from a miner; it crumbles between his fingers like ash. Cut to the company spokesman intoning: "It's not true that coal dust necessarily results in pulmonary impairment."

As the strike drags on, the miners find out that they confront not only the company but the police and the courts as well. Judge F. Byrd Hogg limits the number of pickets to six, three at each entrance to the mine. The sheriff allows the company's "gun thugs" to use their weapons, including a machine gun, but prohibits the strikers from using theirs. The state police beat back the pickets with clubs, making way for the scabs. In classic fashion, one trooper says, when provoked by an angry picket: "I'm only doing my job." Later, in the courtroom, on trial for something or other, one woman makes clear the relation between the company and the law: "The laws are not made for the working people of this country. It's made for Carl Horn [President of Duke Power], not for us."

The structure of power that runs Harlan County is no secret, of course, to those who live there. The class struggle is raw and bloody, out front for everyone to see, undisguised by rhetoric. People in Harlan County know which side they're on; most of them learned it back in the 1930's, or imbibed it with their mothers' milk. One old-timer recalls his first political lesson: "The politicians, the union officials, the priests were all working with the company, but I learned that if you stick together, you can beat 'em." Extracted from the film, lines like these seem banal. Spoken, in the film, by the miners and their wives, they have an authority born of experience. One woman's political education came by watching her father die of black lung disease. "I knew that if I ever got the opportunity to get the coal company, " she says quietly, "I would."

The word "union" has the emotional resonance for the people of Harlan County that it had during the heroic days of the CIO. Kopple asks the 16-year-old widow of a miner shot dead by a scab why her husband went out on the picket line. "He was a union man," she says, and that answer is more than sufficient. Much of this tradition is transmitted by the music that permeates the lives of the miners and fills the film. One of the high points comes with the appearance of Florence Reese to sing, in a voice hoarse with age, "Which Side Are You On," the song she wrote in the 1930's. "The men know they've got nothing to lose but their chains," she says, "and they've got the union to gain."

If anything, Kopple uses the music too liberally, flooding the sound track with ballads and union songs. I found myself wishing she had allowed the people their moments of silence, of muteness, especially during the first funeral, and had not been in such a hurry to elevate their experience to the level of myth. On the other hand, Kopple has been mercifully restrained in her use of historical stock footage. During the 1960's, the New Left had little use for history; now filmmakers are throwing it around as if it were going out of style. Unexamined and poorly understood, it is often used, with the obligatory accompaniment of a few snatches of song, as an easy way of giving authenticity to a weak analysis of contemporary reality. Kopple doesn't do this because she doesn't have to.

The film focuses on the women. During the course of the struggle, it is they who emerge as the locus of energy and determination. After Judge Hogg limited the number of pickets, the women poured out onto the roads to block the scabs. We see them facing down the state troopers, forcing the sheriff to arrest the mine foreman, dealing with their own flagging

Miners and supporters confront Sheriff (far left)

spirits, and gearing up for yet one more confrontation. One woman, accused of stealing another's husband, says: "I'm out for a contract, not a man." An elderly woman, preparing to go out on the picket line, says: "They may shoot me, but they can't shoot the union out of me."

Some of this material is damaged in the editing. The climactic confrontation with the scabs is carefully set up by a scene the night before in which it is planned. Cut to a close-up of a man's face. It is the following morning, out on the road, men and women fully armed, tensely awaiting the scabs. But what might have been a dramatic cut is thrown away by the low-information close-up. We don't know where we are. An establishing shot here would have been much more effective.

This technique of slow disclosure is used so much that it must be intentional. The shooting of one of the miners, Lawrence Jones, is revealed slowly in a close-up pan from his stomach to his head as he lies in the hospital. In another sequence, former Secretary of the Treasury Simon is on camera for 30 seconds or so before he is identified by a title. This kind of editing can be justified as "Brechtian" (it makes us work at deciphering the image), but here, in a traditional narrative film with well developed characters, it is just confusing.

The film's heavies, the scabs and bosses, play their roles with flare. Here is slick Norman Yarborough, the president of Eastover, discussing the role of women in the strike: "I would hate to think that my wife would play that kind of role. There's been some conduct that I would hope that American women wouldn't have to resort to." Questioned about his plans to tear down the company-owned shacks that house the miners, he speaks ingenuously and with some pride about "upgrading (his) people into trailers." At his side sits his lawyer, badly scarred, looking as though he had been struck by lightning. If stock characters like these had appeared in a fiction film, it would have been faulted as heavy-handed propaganda. Yet here they are, big as life, reality's gift to the camera.

The strike drags on, month after month, with no end in sight. The main stumbling block to a settlement is the no-strike clause demanded by management. The violence escalates, the frustration, the anger. The target is elusive. The Eastover Mining Company is a wholly owned subsidiary of Duke Power, the sixth largest utility in the world. Its assets are worth in excess of $2.5 billion. Duke's corporate headquarters are in North Carolina. The strikers send a contingent to Wall Street to picket a stockholders meeting. The film shows a hilarious confrontation between a picket and a sympathetic New York cop. They exchange information on salaries, benefits, and the sorry lot of workers everywhere--a cop on Wall Street and a miner in Harlan County.

The turning point comes, apparently, when one of the strikers, Lawrence Jones, is shot in the face by a scab and killed. The men mobilize to fight. One man says: "Take the shelter you can and lay the lead to 'em," but calmer heads prevail. Led by the women, they turn back a convoy of scabs. The company gives in; the strike is over. The union has won, at least for the moment.

Why it has won is not so clear. Bernie Aronson, a UMW organizer, says it is because the strikers brought pressure to bear on Duke Power in New York and North Carolina. There even seems to be some suggestions that the death of Lawrence Jones brought the company to its senses, that the victory was predicated on restraint, the renunciation of force, self-denial, and sacrifice--the notion that if the miners suffer long enough, they will be rewarded. A curious message, especially for a film whose strongest image, perhaps, is that of Lois Scott, a strike leader, drawing a .38 concealed in her blouse.

It is after the Brookside strike ends, about four-fifths of the way through, that the film begins to lose its bearings. A succession of walkouts follows: a nationwide UMW strike, a series of wildcats set off by a variety of complaints. The film comes to a couple of false endings, which nicely suggest the sense of never-ending struggle. One militant puts it this way: "Once a victory is won, you gotta move onto the next one, or you'll lose the concession. You gotta take. If you expect them to give you something, you'll find 'they don't give nuthin' for nuthin.' You gotta give somethin' in return."

But when Kopple tries to deal with the internal politics of the union, her grip becomes less certain. The film critiques Arnold Miller for reaching an agreement with management, but its attack lacks the clear focus that distinguishes the earlier parts of the film, those which lend themselves to uncomplicated judgments. Miller is initially presented in a favorable light. In one of the film's few editorial slips, he's shown speaking in a low-angle shot--his silver hair dramatically highlighted. Later, when he settles for a no-strike clause, ironically the issue over which the Brookside strike was fought, he is nicely relegated to the rear of the frame, while the foreground is given over to an angry miner who attacks the settlement. In the next shot, the miner confronts Miller, who, with a glance at the camera, says, "Let's go outside." A revealing moment. Another shot shows disgruntled miners making a bonfire out of copies of the agreement.

Miller sells out, so the film seems to say, but maybe not. Kopple adopts a TV news approach, polling miners as they go back to work. The first man says, "I got a good raise. I'm happy." Another, given more screen time, complains, "Not for an old-timer, we didn't get a good contract," but his dissatisfaction is not aimed at Miller as much as it is a meditation on the eternal plight of the miner, whose lot has always been hard, is still, and will be so long as there is coal in the ground and men to mine it. "It was a fight before, and its still a fight.... The coal miner will always be a fighter."

The end of the film stops short of asking some crucial questions about the limits of rank-and-file reformism. Is it doomed to betray its own best impulses? If so, what are the alternatives? HARLAN COUNTY, USA is at ease with the simplicities of the Brookside strike, close as they are to the flavor of the heroic era of industrial organizing, but less so with the intricate ballet of reform and accommodation played out in today's unions. It cloaks its failure to deal with the problem of Miller in truisms about the necessity of ongoing struggle. It attempts to convert a weakness into a virtue by transforming a confused ending into a open-ended one.

This having been said, it remains true that HARLAN COUNTY, USA's strength is not in its analysis but in its passion. In the strike Kopple has found an important and compelling subject, resonant with history and feeling. She has stayed with it and had the good sense to keep out of its way, letting it, after a fashion, speak for itself. HARLAN COUNTY, USA may not have all the answers or even raise all the questions, but it does show us, in case we have forgotten, the strength and power of the people.

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[1] "Burning Up People to Make Electricity," Fred Harris, The Atlantic Monthly, July, 1974. Much of my information about the strike is drawn from Harris's material.

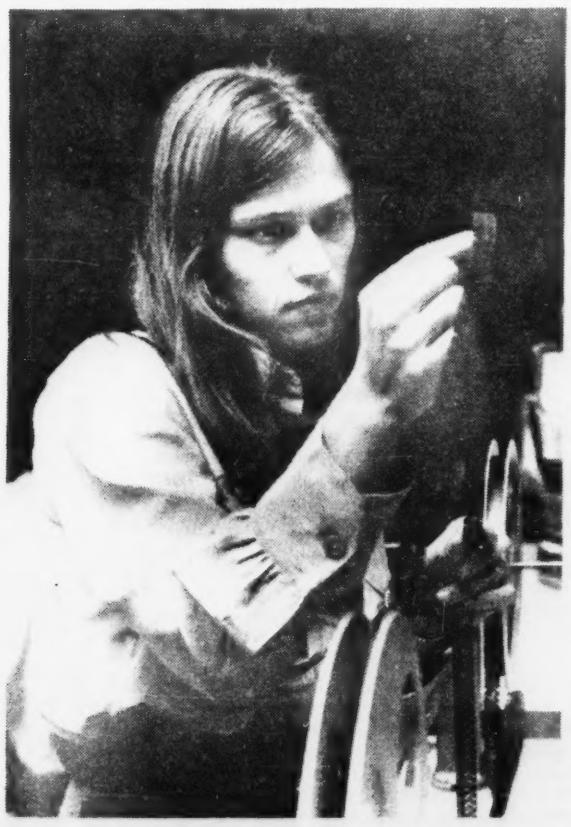
[2] Ibid. ■

Barbara Kopple Interview

--Chuck Kleinhans

I first saw HARLAN COUNTY, USA, in October at the Toronto film festival, a few days after it premiered at the New York festival. The next day I met the filmmaker for an interview. Barbara Kopple impressed me as a vibrant, frank, hard-working, and toughminded person, and I immediately liked her as much as I liked the film.

We began by talking about her background. She began filmmaking by making a film instead of writing a term paper for a clinical psychology course in college. The experience hooked her on filmmaking,



and later she went to New York and worked with the Maysles on SALESMAN and many of their other films. Her political commitment had begun in college with participation in the anti-war movement, and finally she wanted to make her own films to express her own convictions.

In 1972 she began filming the Miners for Democracy movement led by Arnold Miller. When the Boyle machine was ousted from the union leadership, the union began to move on organizing the unorganized, and miners in Harlan County responded. The strike for union recognition began, and Kopple moved to Harlan to cover it for the next year.

Kleinhans: When you were filming it, what use did you see for the film?

Kopple: I was very lucky. Because I had a camera in my hand, I could talk to the union leadership, the coal operators, the gun thugs, the UMW organizers, and the rank and file. It was an incredible influx of information. And then I could communicate and relate that to the people in different courses of the struggle. I wanted to let the struggle emerge and try very hard not to manipulate it. Of course, when you make films they get manipulated, because it comes from a certain point of view. But I also saw the film and see the film now as a great organizing tool. I think that films in themselves never change people, but films are really good bases to have discussions around and to take things to a higher level. There's a lot of uses for the film, particularly in the coal fields and in other trade unions. It's a film that the general public should be able to look at too.

Kleinhans: It must have been a temptation with the immediacy of the issues just to stop and say, "well, I'll make a short film," or "I'll stop because I have this great footage and the issues are there." Yet you went on and showed the whole length of the strike and its aftermath.

Kopple: It wasn't only thinking what kind of things should be in it. It was also feeling that I was engaged in a struggle and that even if I didn't have any film in the camera it was important for me to be there because having a camera there kept down violence. Also, the people there really needed to know that there were other people that cared about them and supported them. It was a part of my life. I was there, and I lived there for a long time, and I lived with them, and I wanted to stay.

Kleinhans: Where were you coming from politically when you started to make the film? Did the process of making the film change you? What did you learn?

Kopple: I guess it changed me tremendously. When I went in there a lot of the people were really backward and I was able to watch change happen: people starting their own newspapers, people starting to study and read politically; we'd all read together and have little study sessions, things like that. It made me learn that you can't do anything by yourself, and that in order to achieve something or in order to win some kind of victory you all have to be united under the same ideas or the same cause. It taught me a lot about criticism and self-criticism--that it wasn't on a personal level, that it was on a political level that depended on the survival of everybody. It also taught me what it meant to be in a life or death situation where nobody was going to help me. The only power you had came from that community, and if that community went against you, you were dead. And those are some very powerful lessons.

Kleinhans: Did you choose people to film who you felt were politically strong to begin with?

Kopple: The main thing that I had to deal with was being there at the right time because lots of different things were going on and really letting the people emerge. Different people came out at different times and became very strong, like the woman with the long black hair, for instance. When the women were having a low morale fight, she sort of cinched it all up by saying, "I'm not fighting for men, I'm fighting for a contract." And the very old woman who said "I've been through all this in the 30's; they may shoot me, but they're not going to shoot the

union out of me." Different people emerged, particularly the women because the men were served court injunctions, and there's no way that you're gonna win a strike having three people in the picket line. It's just not gonna happen. So the women had to come out. All of these women had a long tradition of unionism. That's all they heard from the time that they were kids. It was also the first time that these women were able to actively do anything in their lives and feel their own power and really come alive. There was no way of stopping them. And they were much stronger than the men. I filmed everything that you could possibly film to try to bring more of the men's role, but the men in Appalachia are very low key. The women are very tough and very strong, particularly during the strike.

Kleinhans: I was surprised, but also I was very intrigued, by the scene where one woman is accused of being a troublemaker, of being lazy, and then she responds by saying that another woman is a marriage breaker. Why did you decide to leave that in?

Kopple: I feel that a lot of films that show struggle just show people moving straight forward. But strikes have their ups and strikes have their downs, and to be really together and to show a film that's really gonna work with other people and their struggles, you have to show the low periods as well as the high periods. But you also have to show them getting back together again. And I think that that's what that scene ended with. It's very important because in any kind of political work that we do, you bicker with each other, you have periods of deep depression and you take it out on each other. The thing is to go through that--it's a criticism; it's a criticism of the working class, which is very healthy I think. And I like that scene a lot.

Kleinhans: Another thing I like about the film is the portrayal of Miller, and particularly that moment when someone starts to argue with him and he says, "Let's step outside." It's a perfect portrayal of his role. But how do you analyze him? Do you think it's the man or the institution?

Kopple: Doing that last section of the film was difficult because during the editing of that there was a split between the union's vice-president and the president. There was a lot worse that could have been said about Miller and his collusion with the coal operators. I was real nervous about doing it 'cause I felt that I had a political responsibility, and that if this film ever reinforced the right, the vice-president, that I would be very upset by it. So it took a lot of thinking, a lot of figuring, a lot of discussions to try to figure out how to handle that section of the film. It was handled very lightly with the footage that I had.

I had very definite personal feelings about Miller, but it was just a real struggle in dealing with that section of the film, and dealing with it in a way that people--miners and other people--would understand more who their enemies were, and where the power really had to come from, without coming out and showing it in such a way that might endorse something that's worse. That was really one of the main political decisions of the film--not to do that.

Kleinhans: I thought that one of the side benefits of the film--obviously not the main intention--was how powerfully it spoke to radicals about the power of working class people. The film did not romanticize the workers, yet it showed the incredible strength that they had, and the fact that their strength in many ways comes out of the fact that they don't have a choice about fighting; they really have to fight for everything that they want. A lot of times I get the sense that people with a middle class background find it all too easy to either romanticize or to criticize without understanding the contradictions involved or the source of working people's strength. There's a young man who says that the miners have to keep struggling, and that when they had the big march, people should have gone out to the mine itself.

Kopple: And expropriated the machine gun and the mine itself. He was also saying there's two types of ways to run strikes, and that you've got to move right on to the next struggle.

Kleinhans: Is that your own feeling? I mean, is that the message that you're trying to underline in the film? That's the sense that I get. I didn't know if that was your sense.

Kopple: I agree with him. I think that he made a really good analysis of what was happening. It was really terrific that thousands of miners came in, but they didn't deal with the real issues. When they were gone, the people there were still left alone having to struggle. I agree with that. I think if you don't keep on fighting and you don't keep on struggling that even if you have an organization with thousands you might lose everything that you've gained, so you've got to pull it forward. You've got to take it forward. I agree with him.

Kleinhans: I was impressed by one thing. The whole business with Boyle was stated in a very clear and unexaggerated way. You could easily have spent an awful lot of time on Boyle and really made the whole thing melodramatic between the good guys and the bad guys, and you chose not to. It showed an awful lot of restraint. I think the issue's so dramatic especially since in the media it was so clear that Boyle was such a rat. He looks like a rat.

Sheriff reluctantly confronts mine foreman

Kopple: I think hissing the villain sometimes gets you away from the points that you really want to deal with. And if you give somebody long enough, they hang themselves eventually.

Kleinhans: Another thing that was understated was the situation of the mother and the wife of the man who was shot. You had the footage of the funeral and you had the interview with them. It's very difficult. Either it becomes terribly maudlin and sentimental--and I didn't get that sense at all--or else it becomes almost careless or just tossed aside. It seemed just right. Did you have to work a lot to get that in the editing? There was a real sense that the camera wasn't intrusive, as it is so much with television documentary.

Kopple: They really wanted us to be there. They were kept at the hospital for three days, and he was kept alive by machines. He was dead; you lose part of your brain, and you're not there anymore. It was a tremendous period of suffering for them. And they were very strong people, the mother in particular. She broke down at the funeral, but in the hospital while she was waiting to hear the news she just said, "That's what my son was shot over...he was shot for the union, and I don't want my kids ever to be a yellow-backed scab. I want them to be a union man." And then she told stories about her own life growing up. They were just very strong people. That miner's death also was the only reason that the union and the government and the coal operators got together. Because otherwise there would have been civil war. Those people were arming themselves and getting ready to go out that night and just kill anybody that they saw that was not for the union.

Kleinhans: How did you feel about the issue of violence?

Kopple: I feel that...yeah, you have to change your tactics. If someone's shooting at you you've gotta shoot back. And I was glad when that happened. That was a tactical change that came from the workers themselves. I'm sure glad there were guns there. That might sound strong to people in other areas, but in this area...

Kleinhans: I don't think anyone who sees the film could think that.

Kopple: Even now I've been hearing this whole liberal thing of "ban the gun." I don't think they should ban the gun. It's very important to have ourselves armed.

Kleinhans: When the thugs came down and attacked the camera...what happened?

Kopple: Oh, it was just an incredible scene. We had all gotten together by a supermarket at about 4:30 in the morning. Suddenly we see a scab caravan go by. So like idiots, all of us--the rest of the people hadn't come--get in our cars and go up to the picket line. The scab caravan stopped at the gas station, where they always stopped. It was pitch black out, and suddenly we hear this gunfire--semi-automatic carbines. We don't know where it's coming from; it's sort of like lighting up the sky. Then as the gun thugs started to come up, it stops, so it had to be from across where the company was. Then the scabs went through, came back, got me first, got the camera and then beat the shit out of people. Basil, the head gun thug, put a gun into one of the black miners, Bill Worthington's belly, pushed him into the bushes. People were getting beaten with pipes and things. But it was very dark so in the film you can't see much but Basil walking around with his gun. They sufficiently scared and intimidated people and then went right back across the bridge. It was a very scary scene. I wasn't scared when it was happening because I was so angry. They pushed me up against the rocks and I just started swinging to keep them off of me. They took each one of us individually and did that to us. The cameraman, Hart Perry, was yelling, "the camera's broken, the camera's broken," and that's all they really wanted to do was to make sure that we weren't functioning.

Kleinhans: How did you finance the film?

Kopple: I used to write letters for money from miners' homes; I'd be sitting there with maybe five dollars in my pocket. I used to race back to New York City, show little pieces of it to different groups. I'd try to find places that would let me xerox hundreds of grant proposals and I'd spend days collating them and writing them out and writing zillions of fund-raising letters. I learned so much about fund-raising from foundations that I could write a book about it. It was a tremendously painful experience to have to keep dealing with it because I couldn't relate to it. I'd be in Harlan and I'd have to come home and try to figure out how to do a fund-raising pitch and how to talk to these people, and it was very hard. People supported it, but I sometimes had to bleed to get anything--I just had to give so much and go so far out just to get anything to keep going.

Kleinhans: Did you have any choice in that? You had no other way of financing it?

Kopple: No other way. I went to a few producers who'd say "why is a little girl like you doing a film like this?" Foundations were the only way. It was just weird because it's the excess of capitalism that's supporting this film and they're supposed to be doing humanitarian, kind of educational things. So I had to do research on all the different foundations to see what they'd funded in the past, show them stuff that would just really try to knock them out and then try to talk about it. I didn't enjoy it. I met a lot of really good people out of it and a lot of good people came forward to support it. But it's so difficult for independent filmmakers or people who are making films about social issues to get funded. It's a really negative system because they get you to compete against all your peers. Maybe there's ten people that are gonna get grants and 100 people have proposals. Right? I mean, it's a lousy deal.

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☆NOTE: INTERVIEW WITH FEMINIST FILM DIRECTOR☆ Sally Barret-Page, who talks about the film production of *Like A Rose*, appears in Issue 3.

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Kleinhans: Well, now you face the other end of it--distribution.

Kopple: I don't even know what questions to ask. It's something that I'm not going to rush into. The things that I have to have in a contract are: that the film will not be recut; that the film will be able to be used by workers for free or the cost of the mailing or whatever they can afford; that it can be used for political benefits--things like that. And also I want to pay off my debts and I want to have enough money to begin another film. I don't think that's asking for a lot. The film cost over $200,000 to make and it took four years. But from the way people talk you're lucky if you get a couple of thousand dollars just to keep going. And I'm torn because I want it to be distributed on a really wide level so that a lot of people can see it. But I also have to deal with the realities of what I'm capable of doing and what I'm not capable of doing. And I'm not capable of having all of these debts over me. There's no way in the world I can ever pay those off. And I just don't know if foundations are going to continue to fund the films that I want to do. So I've got to have something just to be able to begin, to get a little footage so that I can start the same routine over again of, you know, raising money to do another film.

Kleinhans: What do you want to do? What's your next film?

Kopple: I want to do a film on the black belt in the South and the struggle for unionization, particularly around textiles. I want to do a film in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina at a J.P. Stevens textile mill that's been struggling to be part of the union now for 15 years. It will show the movement of industry north to south, and be an investigation into what the civil rights movement was all about too. It's another big one; it might take another three years, but I really want to do it. I've got a lot of research to do and a lot of thinking to do...

Kleinhans: ...It will be worth waiting for.

HARLAN COUNTY, USA is now being distributed by Cinema 5, 595 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10022. ▮

WHITE LINE FEVER

PROMISE & FRUSTRATION

--Leonard J. Leff

Midway through WHITE LINE FEVER, truck drivers Pops Dinwiddie and Carrol Jo Hummer discover a pair of desperadoes trying to push them off an Arizona highway. With youthful assurance, Hummer arms himself, sidles out of the cab window, and inches across his still speeding trailer; carefully he aims at his pursuers radiator and with a couple of well-placed shots manages to set their cab afire and run them into a stone wall. The scene is representative since the film is stocked with requisite violence: beatings, arson, vandalism, fisticuffs, stabbing, vehicular homicide. Hummer's bravado and the film's violence, however, are only gleamings on the water's surface.

The political undertow, which sporadically tugs at the viewer, suggests that WHITE LINE FEVER essentially is about the political education of Carrol Jo Hummer. In high school, he was taught that the American economic system is structured to reward individual initiative; in trying to operate independent of an oligarchic trucking firm to exercise initiative, he quickly learns of the distance between theory and practice. Unfortunately, so tenuous is the relationship between surface and undertow, between text and subtext, that what has the potential of a small-scale OCTOBER culminates in something more spiritually akin to Ma Joad's boosterism at the end of Ford's GRAPES OF WRATH.

The film begins with a lot of promise. A Tucson television newsman says that movies show only the affluent but that interest--indeed, "great human drama"--lies elsewhere on the economic spectrum. The use of an obviously sympathetic local reporter rather than a button-down Cronkite suggests that the film may present a working class perspective. Furthermore, through emphasis on the word "drama," the audience may reasonably anticipate a conflict between the working class, which struggles for an equitable share of the wealth, and the monied class, which preserves wealth undistributed. The reporter turns to a trucker, an independent, and asks how far he would go to protect his "rig" and his "profession"; the answer--you never know till you're put to the test--is less interesting than the question.

"Profession" here is no idle euphemism, even in a society that encourages class distinctions. As a cap elevates the nursing school graduate and wings elevate the airman, so the trucker perceives that he ascends upon acquiring his rig. No matter that The Bank, the means of his pride, controls this professional's livelihood in a way it controls that of no other. To the trucker, the rig certifies entry into an American mainstream: he is propertied. Uppers and coffee and CB chatter alone won't get a load of avocados to Salt Lake City on a 24 hour run; a commitment to professionalism will.

After the reporter scene, a montage sequence introduces Hummer (Jan-Michael Vincent). He returns from military service, reunites with his family, and marries Jerri Kane (Kay Lenz), the girl he left behind; some stills, grainy and in sepia or muted colors, capture a high school memory, a birthday, a Thanksgiving dinner, and other family affairs. Then Hummer secures his loan, shakes hands with the bank officer, and buys his rig. The narrative proper has begun against a backdrop rigorous in its adherence to the ideology of textbook civics, especially in the brief bank scene. Superior to a similar preface in ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE, the sequence illustrates Hummer's acting upon expectations that social and academic experience have aroused within him. His practical education lies ahead.

Over the CB radio, Hummer announces that he's an owner-operator and "you gotta operate to own." His philosophy is first tested when he picks up a haul from Duane Haller (Slim Pickens), a Red River trucking manager. Before departing, Hummer learns that contraband merchandise is aboard and orders it removed. Haller first appeals to his friendship with Hummer's late father, hypocritically invoking and thus mocking a value that Hummer cherishes, family. When Hummer is unmoved, Haller says, "Nobody's getting hurt . . . but Uncle Sam." Haller's easy disregard for not only the family but the community intimates that Hummer is naive: realistically, capitalism's flow of goods precedes community and family values. Hummer steadfastly holds in contempt the Glass House, a giant corporation that controls Red River and all of Arizona's other shippers and brokers. Mr. Cutler (Don Porter), the owner of Glass House, hears of Hummer's righteous indignation and orders first his elimination from the business and then his death.

From this point, one may glorify the remainder of WHITE LINE FEVER by calling it a romance--a perilous journey climaxed by a grand struggle and the hero's exaltation--or demythologize it by calling it a cut-above-the-average, saturation-advertised action movie for the neighborhoods and drive-ins. Neither stance constitutes a radical film criticism. A third alternative, then, is to examine the film to see how its principal action at once proffers yet undercuts a viable solution for Hummer. In order to understand this ambivalence, one must recognize that Hummer's disillusionment and the film's climax proceed from the implied discrepancy between capitalism's ruddy exterior and its worm-wrought core. Oddly enough, nowhere is this promise and frustration theme shown more incisively than in two brief yet realistic scenes involving Jerri; their brevity probably results from the filmmakers' desire to avoid antagonizing (or calling to arms) an audience altogether familiar with the problems of alienating work and unwanted pregnancies.

After suffering broken ribs in a beating, Hummer is forced to recuperate and rely on his wife's economic support. The short scene of her at work in a Dr. Pepper canning plant is powerfully understated. A serpentine tracking shot discovers Jerri standing beside a machine that automatically spits out faulty cans at her as they travel through the last lap of the assembly line. The rejects clang into a bin on her left, and she must empty the bin periodically. Jerri's work is not unlike her husband's: her job does not demand great physical strength; it actually produces nothing, it's performed alone, and it involves a machine. But Hummer is master of his machine: he drives it, not vice versa. It is a totem, an extension of himself so animated that it even has a name, "Blue Mule." Because Jerri is handmaiden to rather than operator of a machine, her automated work is absolutely dehumanizing. It's solitary and unfulfilling. Momentarily she pauses just as a young female supervisor, clipboard in hand, passes by and barks: "You're paid to work; relax on your own time." In retaliation, after the supervisor has turned away, Jerri shoots her the finger.

The factory scene--minus the gesture--is reminiscent of one in A BRIEF VACATION, but whereas De Sica uses the system to illuminate character, WHITE LINE FEVER director Jonathan Kaplan uses character to illuminate the system. The Italian heroine escapes out of the molten city into the cool, white mountains; in this new environment, ironically at government expense, she regains the human qualities that the exigencies of Milanese life had darkened. Having cured the woman, the state returns her to Milan, her predicament approaching that of CATCH-22's man-in-white. Although De Sica's focus remains less political than psychological and more descriptive than argumentative, Kaplan's seems to posit a radical solution. The film's factory scene suggests that a society theoretically prizing individuality and economic mobility actually frustrates both. Again, if a worker attempts even momentarily to impede capitalism's flow of goods, he or she is rejected like an imperfect can.

Moreover, the system creates schisms where solidarity should exist: Jerri and her supervisor, though blinded by the artificial designations "labor" and "management," are two women jointly serving the same master. The point of the bottling scene is that the work is superior to the worker and the profit superior to both. Jerri's insignificant act as human being rather than as automaton threatens to lead to rebellion, so she's immediately and harshly reproved. The Glass House gang's assaults against Hummer are almost credible when seen as part of the same world in which one woman verbally abuses another for stopping to wipe her face.

The bleakness of Jerri's world is suggested further in the scene in the public clinic's waiting room. She suspects she's pregnant and seeks confirmation. The camera, in medium shot, begins with the patient seated opposite Jerri; slowly and silently it circles the waiting room towards her, finding one unexpressive face after another, expectant fathers as well as mothers. Like the bottling plant scene, this one also has a disquieting effect. On the walls are cheery posters with greeting card sentiments or health care tips for pregnant women, but people's faces in the room register only grim anticipation. And the circling camera has knit them all together in a common biological trap. The ultimate act of creation, serviced here on an assembly line, holds little promise for persons locked into a class system. Their faces reveal resignation, a lesson naturally learned within a society whose promise is like a carrot on a string. So when her pregnancy is confirmed, Jerri is despondent; she contemplates abortion, but her brother Jamie strongly counsels against it, adding that Hummer would share his feelings.

Even as Jamie and Carrol Jo oppose exploitation outside the home, they unwittingly further sexism. Jerri's victimization not only as a person but as a woman gives her more exposure than her husband to capitalism's contradictions. Thus, when Hummer is framed for homicide, she urges acceptance of the prosecuting attorney's deal. She recognizes realities Hummer is blind to--that her husband will have a two-bit lawyer (whom a fellow teamster duly supplies) and that the monied interests will own the government prosecuter (which the Glass House does). During the climax of his struggle with the Glass House, Hummer tells Jerri, "I can't be fighting the whole world and you at the same time." Rather than fight with him, she withdraws. No fantasy violence in WHITE

LINE FEVER has the intensity and grittiness her two scenes achieve so economically.

From an artistic standpoint, the central weakness of WHITE LINE FEVER is its failure to supply realistic adversaries for Hummer. The formulaic plot and stereotyped characters are generic as defined by recent films such as BILLY JACK and WALKING TALL, and in their reassertion of the familiar, they are undoubtedly crowd pleasing. But finally the characters' transparence limits an audience's awareness of the penetration and subtlety of the system's inherently abusive exercise of power. The trio of cartoon capitalists who oppresses Hummer threatens to become an opiate by inviting the audience to compare its own superiors to Hummer's and find the former benign.

Hummer's descent through three circles of an Arizona inferno forms the basic structure of WHITE LINE FEVER. "A whole lot more to this than just you and me," Haller tells the petulant Hummer early on. But clearly Haller is part of the corruption. His office icebox is packed with Schlitz, probably raked off the top of the enormous beer shipment awaiting loading on the outside dock. Haller is an urban cowboy. His white western suit and his matching white Thunderbird, sporting a pair of longhorns on its hood, suggest how a plundering ruling class makes animals as well as people serve decadent ends. In his last hour, Haller takes a drive with Lucy (Leigh French), the woman whose hint of sexual favors has lured him to the place of his assassination. In a neat variation of the promise/frustration theme, Haller steps out into the middle of the road and is run over by Glass House gang truckers. His death shows how expendable the lower echelon are to the upper. More important, it advances Hummer's struggle to locate and rout corruption's source.

Buck Wessle (L. Q. Jones), manager of Red River, is Mr. Cutler's hatchet man. Because he's closer to the source and further from the truckers than Haller, Buck has an undisguised contempt for the drivers. Haller was a driver, along with Hummer's father, and when he promises an old black teamster work (promise/frustration), one feels that only his superiors prevent him from honoring his commitment. But Buck is above it all, literally. When he says goodbye to Hummer, who has negotiated a haul with a rifle to the manager's head, it is via a microphone located in his office over the dock, the camera shooting from a long angle. His detachment from and power over the men is mightily suggested by the angle and the public address system, which transmits but doesn't receive.

While the truckers and loaders sweat, Buck relaxes in his air-conditioned office with its gold draperies drawn against the sun and throughout the film urges Cutler not to worry about a "revolution"--Cutler's word--of "jigaboos," "crackers," and "white trash."

Near the end of the film Buck kills Pops Dinwiddie. Pop's young black friends have been hostile toward Hummer because of an alleged master-slave relationship between Hummer, Sr., and Pops, but the murder heals the breach. The alliance is another of the film's pulled punches: the blacks join Hummer to avenge Dinwiddie's death, not to change the course of events that placed his life and their livelihood in jeopardy. In terms of a revolutionary solution to their problems, the weak motivation serves neither the blacks nor the other truckers well. Nevertheless, a ragtag bunch of blacks and whites busts up one of Buck's office debaucheries, with Carrol Jo pursuing Buck. The chase through the warehouse is photographed through tunnels made of corridors, stacked boxes, and finally the two trucks, between which Hummer beats Buck senseless. As in the clinic waiting room scene, the photography reinforces the film's point: Hummer is tunneling through to the heart of the corruption, the inferno's third circle.

As his name suggests, Mr. Cutler has carved out his territory and will carve up those who threaten it. The extent of his power within the state seems limitless. Bob, a deputy sheriff, is on his payroll, the Public Prosecuter shares his steambath and participates in his machinations, and the governor's nephew (and by implication the governor) is a good friend. Asked by Hummer to describe the grand jury that may indict him for Haller's murder, the attorney responds, his voice pointedly ironic, "Sixteen of your peers--signed, sealed, and delivered--(cut to portrait of Washington in the hearing room) just like the Constitution says." That the jury doesn't indict Hummer doesn't alleviate the audience's feeling that the judiciary is in Cutler's pocket. Hummer protests that "the truth" got him off, Jerri insists that it was luck, and in a blaze of contradiction the film suggests--through the Washington portrait--that it was the American system.

At a private dinner in Glass House, with a black wine steward hovering nearby, Cutler lifts his glass to "money, love, and the time to enjoy it." That the film's premier capitalist places "money" first is unsurprising; "love" comes in second, for--as Wessle's and Cutler's behavior illustrates--it is a bought commodity. Time comes cheap to Cutler, who's rarely seen working. He's in his steambath plotting, his office putting, his golf course playing.

Wessle drives out to the course to report that Hummer wasn't indicted. Again the cinematography is especially instructive. The course is wide and uncluttered, Hummer's space confined (as in the cab) or tunneled; the course is green, Hummer's Tucson brown. In fact, Hummer's Tucson resembles Fellini's early, strange wastelands. Carrol Jo's stone house

is an enlarged, Americanized model of Cabiria's, complete with a yard of discarded mechanical contrivances and loose brush. Images of aridity and infertility recur frequently in WHITE LINE FEVER (from Hummer's haul of rotten avocados to a beating that results in Jerri's becoming sterile), but nowhere are they conveyed with greater clarity than in the implied comparison between them and Cutler's lush, verdant playground.

Before Glass House stands a multi-story glass monolith, "GH." Hummer passes it once when he and a group of truckers are invited to discuss their efforts with Cutler. After Cutler privately offers to buy him off, Hummer returns to the assemblage and asks: "Do we want to work for ourselves or the Glass House, the state, and Uncle Sam?" Again it's a question more interesting than the unsurprising response: Cutler and the government are common tools of oppression (indeed, the latter fosters the former) attempting to strip the workers of their livelihood and their self-esteem. The corruption is pervasive, the solution within the men themselves. Hummer's resistance in the face of physical abuse has won him the attention of his fellows, but until he crashes his rig through the glass monolith and nearly loses his life, little concerted action is taken. Then, in the film's last scene, Hummer is wheeled out on the hospital lawn to see the hundreds of truckers who honor him silently.

Their presence is meant to suggest the workers' victory, but it lacks impact. First, despite the inclusion of some token racism, the film shows no one being persecuted but Hummer. Haller, Wessle, and Cutler are too much the cartoon capitalists, and the workers--except Hummer--too little their victims. Even after Red River goons crack his ribs, Hummer goes back. To him money is "more important" than curing the corruption. Will it be for those who know only secondhand of physical pain, of deprivation? The oppression needs more generalization; Jerri's scenes help but are finally far too brief.

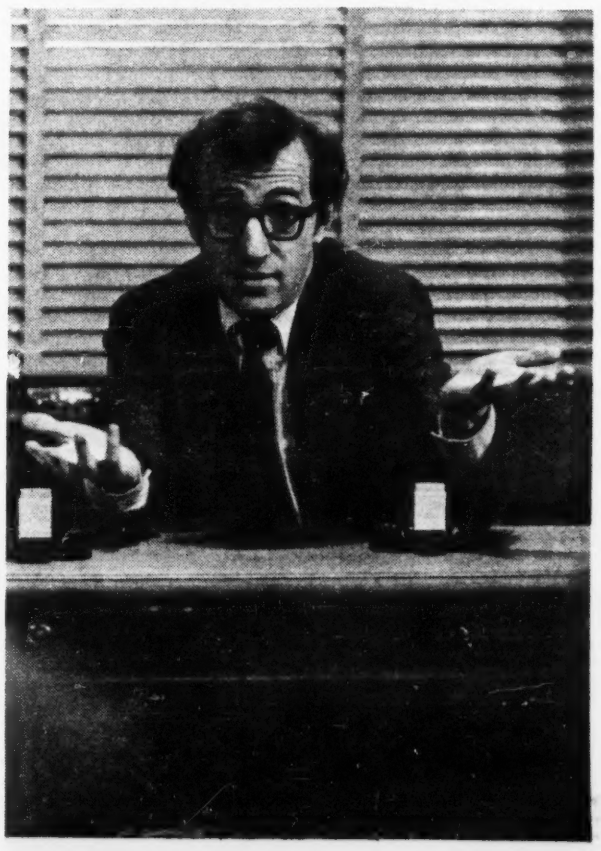
Second, though Cutler calls Hummer "charismatic," little in his manner or in others' responses to Hummer suggests this quality. Five shelves of books line his bedside, but his dialogue betrays only average intelligence. The books and the Vermeer on the dining room wall are empty tokens of a naive dream to which he once subscribed. So haven't these people really come to the hospital lawn to see what the audience itself has come to see, a working class hero who has romantically routed corruption to achieve the success, rather than the frustration, that is the essence of American Promise? And because his victory is wholly personal and wrested from straw men, isn't it finally insignificant?

At film's end the television announcer says that the truckers are not on strike for hours, wages, benefits, but for a man. The man's bravado--from pushing a bully into manure to shimmying across the top of his speeding rig and finally crashing through "GH"--belongs to the movie cowboy, who rides the range alone. Whether those men on the hospital lawn will act is a moot question. They are passive. They lack dynamism and urgency. Jerri's unhappy expression as she views them implies that Hummer's job is unfinished and still unshared. Driving their rigs for Cutler has given them white line fever. They've pulled into the Hummer truck stop--for the day--for some diversion and relief, but it seems all too likely that they'll be on the road again tomorrow. Accordingly, the promise of the film is frustrated. ■

THE FRONT

comm symp sitcom

--Michael Rosenthal



THE FRONT is the first movie to come out of Hollywood that deals directly with the Hollywood blacklist of the early fifties, the time when "communist sympathizers" were effectively barred from employment in the entertainment industry. It is the first movie to deal directly with the cold war, although there have, of course, been many pictures that were part of the cold war, from straightforward indoctrination efforts such as I MARRIED A COMMUNIST in the early fifties, to the James Bond extravaganzas in the mid-sixties.

Despite all the talk about Hollywood's "nostalgia craze," the cold war period has been a virtual black hole so far as the national media are concerned, either taken for granted or treated as if it never existed. So far as one could tell from nostalgia products like American Graffiti, the fifties were chiefly significant as the golden age of rock and roll.

But this is a gross distortion of a tremendously important period. The needs of post-World War II American imperial expansion, along with the desire of those in power to root out all traces of potential domestic challenge, combined to produce a feverish, altogether religious anti-communism. This was presented as the fundamental struggle of good vs. evil, freedom vs. slavery, "democracy" vs. "totalitarianism." Militants were driven from the trade unions, progressive teachers were driven from the schools, while school children (I remember this vividly) had to dive under their flimsy wooden desks every month in practice A-bomb drills.

With the breakdown of what some national politicians are now referring to as "our old moral certainties," this period is beginning to stand out in relief and Hollywood is increasingly coming to deal with it.

One device to do that, used in last year's TV show FEAR ON TRIAL, is to present the purges as an accidental, hysterical "aberration of justice," where unfortunate innocents got

caught up with genuine communists. Unlike that show, THE FRONT was put together by blacklist victims, with no vested interest in the reputation of the film industry, who obviously desire to deal honestly with a system that tried to destroy them. Nevertheless, from a political standpoint, it represents no more of a threat to the foundations of anti-communism than the TV show did.

Woody Allen plays a small time bookie who fronts for an old school chum, a TV writer who cannot sell scripts under his own name. Allen soon accumulates a stable of blacklisted writers, and becomes the most prized writer on TV — all the more valuable because of his blameless past. Allen plays the role as a watered down version of his standard character, the self-doubting egotistical nerd. However, after he is shocked by the suicide of a blacklisted actor, and challenged by his noble girlfriend, he defies a legislative committee, to the suprise of everyone except the audience, and goes to jail a martyr to the cause.

If this all sounds somehow familiar, think of all the westerns you have seen in which a spineless weakling is mistaken for a great gunfighter, becomes a tool of the local corrupt gamblers, but redeems himself in the end by standing up to them in the final shootout. THE FRONT follows this formula to the letter, modifying it only slightly to substitute a cold war America for a frontier town.

The problem here is not that it relies on an old formula, since there is probably no such thing as a totally original story. The problem is that this particular formula destroys the possibility of understanding the situation socially or politically by turning it into a sentimentalized morality play. The world is divided between heroes and cowards. Bad times (the cold war, the corrupt town) result when the cowards outnumber the heroes; everything would be okay if people simply had a little more backbone.

Within this framework the transformation of a coward into a hero becomes the central dramatic event, regardless of what he/she is being heroic or cowardly about. The vicious character of fifties anti-communism is not denied, but instead of being examined, in a strange way it becomes subordinate to the plot, as if the only function of history is to provide a test of people's moral fiber. The result of this procedure is to leave the audience with a warm sense of smug self-righteousness, an easy identification with the "good guys," completely undiluted by a sense of what it meant to be a communist in the fifties (or any other time) — what kinds of things communists believed in and what social forces were ranged against them.

It certainly doesn't help that the whole affair is mounted on the level of a third-grade pageant, with characters who merely symbolize various attitudes towards the blacklist, and situations that would look creaky in a situation comedy. At the same time, it is also difficult not to respond to the film, knowing it was created by writers, directors and actors who had been blacklisted themselves, and who have obviously held the project dear to their hearts for a long time.

Nevertheless, even if it had been well-executed, a film like this can only further the process of reformulating the potentially explosive history of the fifties in a harmless and apolitical fashion.

THE FRONT brings to a mass audience at least an awareness of the anti-communist purges of the 50s that pervaded the country. In this way it opens up a previously hidden period to examination. But in terms of actually beginning the analysis needed, well-intentioned sentiment is simply not an adequate substitute for political understanding, even (or especially) in the movies.

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■

The Front is great!

Michael Rosenthal's review of THE FRONT sparked some interesting responses which we are reprinting from the Dec.-Jan., 1977 issue of Common Sense.

Dear *Common Sense*:

I strongly disagree with the review of THE FRONT in your November issue. It is a fine, enjoyable film, which, while it does not present a thorough overall analysis of the political situation of the early fifties, does, at least, present many of its elements. I think it is great to see the basic formula for Westerns — spineless weakling stands up to the bad guys in the end — used in a political context. This stock plot should not simply be sneered at. It is part of the American democratic tradition, where the common man can rise to the occasion out of the pettiness of daily life, though usually it is applied to reactionary situations.

It was part of the tragedy of many Communists that they had subordinated themselves to a party which in their minds represented the inexorable forces of history. Part of the tragedy of the forties and fifties was the people who were torn between their commitment to a socialist society and to a party which was subservient to Stalin.

I do not believe that THE FRONT contributes to making the "potentially explosive history of the fifties" harmless. It approaches the question of which side are you on at the gut level. It is for future films to better delineate the sides.

Stephen Barton

Dear Editor:

I was profoundly disturbed by the review of THE FRONT which appeared in *Common Sense* recently. I feel that despite its "left" veneer, Michael Rosenthal's review imitates the clamor of the establishment media that THE FRONT was enough of a ". . . threat to the foundations of anti-communism" to justify blasting it out of the water.

The main contribution that THE FRONT makes from a "political standpoint" is that it sets the record straight. It is difficult to miss the connection between the bombs that fell over Korea in 1952 and those that fell over Vietnam in 1972.

THE FRONT shows one instance (out of many) in which an ordinary person was capable of extraordinary courage. The fact is that many spoke out and were ruined, and that if there had been more courage among the hypocritical liberals of the entertainment industry it would have been harder for the witchhunt to succeed.

Michael Rosenthal compares the film to a western melodrama. He claims it is on the level of a third grade pageant. He says it only helps to reformulate history "in a harmless and apolitical fashion." He says all of this without once backing up his claims with examples from the film.

People I have talked to who experienced the witchhunt, including one of the Hollywood 10, felt THE FRONT said what needed to be said. I will leave it to the infantile arrogance of Michael Rosenthal to disagree with them.

Charles Perkel ■

Reply by Rosenthal

The criticism of my piece, in these letters and elsewhere, advance two basic arguments. 1) THE FRONT opens a wedge toward the understanding of the cold war, and should be treated primarily as a progressive phenomenon; by failing to do so, I am allying with the bourgeois reviewers who trashed the film. 2) The use of conventional plot devices is a positive thing in helping the film's message reach the mass audience.

The first point involves questions of tactics, concerning both film making and film criticism, that I have rarely seen rigorously discussed. Consider, for example, the Hollywood anti-racist film, from HOME OF THE BRAVE (1949) to THE DEFIANT ONES (1958). When they were made, they could legitimately be said to have "opened a wedge" of some kind. Now they are generally seen to be patronizingly racist in their treatments and mawkishly insincere in their resolution. Can these pictures meaningfully be considered "progressive" then and "racist" now? I do not have a clearly worked out position on this; but it is evident that some consideration must be given to the treatment of a theme, and not merely its presence.

This brings us to the second argument. I probably should not have drawn my example from the western, since this gave the impression, despite my demurral, that I opposed the use of "conventional plot structures" in general. What I wanted to get at was the film's moralism--its posing of social and historical conflicts in abstractly moral terms. Certainly many people took courageous and moral stands; but they did so as a product of, as well as actors in, a specific historical process, not as exemplars of an abstract struggle between "commitment" and "cowardice."

The moralistic treatment of a theme I am discussing here is not one the left can turn to its own ends. It is most pervasive, in fact, in the "socially up-lifting" and not very popular products of cold-war liberalism. This treatment rests on an ideological foundation which is essentially religious. It presents a universe which is the stage (against shifting backdrops) of an eternal division between good and evil, between grand souls with noble ideals and lesser souls limited to what Barton calls "the pettiness of everyday life" above which the hero of THE FRONT manages to rise.

This moralism actually suppresses concrete historical and political factors, by excluding them from the center of dramatic interest. Here is a film that "sets the record straight" on a nationwide anti-communist campaign, but for all we can tell Communists were believers in the Vitamin C cure for the common cold while anti-Communists brutally favored aspirin. When all the politics are removed from a film about anti-communism what is left? A film about an anti-anything crusade, about the contest between "conformity" and "individual pluck."

Such a war of moral categories--applied to rather than drawn from the material context--can and has been used effectively to support just about anything. Elia Kazan, one of those who named names in the Congressional inquisition, made ON THE WATERFRONT to celebrate the moral splendour of informing. Recently, critic Molly Haskell described her trip to Iran to legitimate the Shah's "feminist film forum" as a courageous definance of the "totalitarian" dictates of "the knee-jerk left" (*Village Voice* 6/21/76). In each case, abstract moralism is enlisted to sanctify a position which might otherwise be abhorrent to the "common man" my critics cite. The question is whether it is proper or possible to outmaneuver the dominant ideology on its mystical flank.

I am aware that many people who struggled and suffered in the fifties feel personally vindicated by this film, and that they have had more experience than I have in both politics and film. Nevertheless, their opinions are not final. The film was not (or should not have been) made for them, but for an audience which has never had the opportunity to come to terms with the meaning or lasting effects of the cold war. The central issue, it seems to me, is whether THE FRONT provides this audience with any of the tools it needs to do so, or whether it merely relocates the signs that tell the audience whom to cheer and whom to boo. ■

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CARRIE
RAGTIME: The Horror of Growing up Female

--Serafina Kent Bathrick

From its beginnings, classical Hollywood cinema has relied on and reinforced the "natural" characteristics of women (reproductive or destructive) in order to motivate and propel its closed narrative structures. Certain coded behavior on screen could represent a woman as ideal mother or as lustful vamp: if she tells bedtime stories to children, she'll never be seen smoking cigarettes in her negligee. However, Hayes Codes and culture industry politics often permitted a fallen woman to die--so that her last minute suicide allowed for the rescue of her little son (THREE ON A MATCH, 1932). Or an innately possessive nurse could finally be treated for her murderous tendencies after collapsing, suffering, and surrendering to a forgiving husband and a psychiatric ward full of experts (POSSESSED, 1947). Until recently, with the advent of the disaster film, in which "Mother Nature" herself wipes out whole cities, the individual woman has mostly been spared the capacity for large-scale destruction. But now, in the age of the crazily mixed genre film, where confused narratives tell us that humans are decadent, technology doesn't work, and nature has been ravished, there emerge whole new possibilities for ways to explain the rationalization of life and the destruction of community--again in terms of the nature of women. As Carrie White comes of age, she discovers that "she's got the power." With earth, air, fire, and water at her command, she annihilates a generation of all-American teenagers.

From the outset of CARRIE, Brian de Palma's latest film, the telekinetic abilities of the central character are intimately connected to her new-found physiological functions: she discovers her menstrual blood and her unnatural powers begin. The film is divided into two halves that ultimately reinforce the biologism that is used to explain Carrie's destructive nature: first, her self-discovery brings the entire high school to know of her private ignorance and fear; this culminates with the central, most public incident (the senior prom), in which her precarious self-confidence is again shattered by the bloody revenge of her classmates. Thus, the second half of the film simply traces Carrie's rampage, in which her crazed mind and body join to produce the complete destruction of her community. This simple narrative gives film audiences new and not so new ways to consider the reification of women through their physical attributes. Sociopolitical contradictions can still be covered with the ritualized esthetic of female biology. It is ironic and fitting that de Palma can exploit the new openness with which the media have attempted to discuss and demystify women's sexuality. His film style reveals the dedicated relish with which he encounters and twists the subject--at his most flamboyant he can weave fear and self-hate into a spectacle of female destruction. There is an urgency in his desire to prove the impossibility of community among women.

In order to examine the implications of de Palma's esthetic and his use of the naturally destructive woman, it is important to look closely at exactly how he averts any analysis of the social causes for the narrative development of the film. From the outset, the image of blood plays on our senses, creating the kinds of fears of women which prevail in most pre-industrial cultures. The witch-healer in Medieval Europe was a triple threat to Church and State. Contemporary analyses have pointed out the significance of her function, along with its threat to the social order.

> She appeared to be part of an organized underground of peasant women. And she was a healer whose practice was based in empirical study. In the face of the repressive fatalism of Christianity, she held out the hope of change in this world.[1]

De Palma exploits the position of women in this tradition of healers and rebels, and by systematically witch-hunting for social wrongs through the sexualizing of women's nature and bodily functions, he upholds and contributes to the kind of scapegoating that keeps capitalist culture in the service of the state. Every woman in CARRIE is understood entirely in terms of her sexual frustration or potency: Carrie's mother and teacher are middle-aged loners--one a neurotic fundamentalist, the other a lonely romantic. For both women the focus on prom night reinforces de Palma's central icon, and Mrs. White cannot consider the occasion anything but an orgy, while Miss Collins recalls her own prom as a moment of adolescent innocence. Carrie's two peers represent a similar polarity--sweet Sue is a well-meaning monogamist and Chris a spoiled nymphomaniac. For prom night they both get favors and affirmation from their boyfriends. Carrie herself is limited and defined by this repellent culture of women, but tops them all in her capacity to destroy and be destroyed.

Carrie's mother (Piper Laurie)

In recent studies on the history of menstruation, fears connected with witch-women are associated with the belief that at the time of their monthly periods, women are their most self-aware, most powerful, and most destructive. In many cultures the menstruating woman threatens male virility, contaminates crops or poisons the food she cooks. Thus her reproductive powers are linked to destructive ones: "Menstrual blood, the outward sign of her duality, could be her weapon to annihilate the society she was responsible for preserving."[2] De Palma's career as film director suggests his own desire to reconcile or flatten this dangerous dualism. In SISTERS, the surviving siamese twin takes on the personality of her homocidal "other half" who had died during their surgical separation. In a more recent bomb by de Palma, OBSESSION (1976), his Hitchcock hommagery thinly coats the same concern with a woman whose posthumous mystique gives proof of her duplicitous nature; this time she leaves her double, a daughter, behind to do the necessary damage. In CARRIE the same director further reveals his bewildered fascination with female power; and as he described it in his earlier films, he once again denies the operation of class or institutional force by focussing on the biological determinism of women.

To look closely at de Palma's style--its often fatuous display of filtered images, overstuffed frames, and floating cameras--is to understand further the modes by which he has developed his own brand of sexism. Though the film opens with a brief pre-credit scene, shot from high angle to show the mechanics of a girl's volleyball game, there is neither the director's flamboyance nor any of the real interest in this activity to tell us anything about high school, gym classes, or girls as athletes. The camera quickly locates Carrie and cranes down towards her fumbling figure in the corner, and, as the game ends with her miss, a surge of angry schoolmates run past her towards the gym, calling to the gawky girl: "You eat shit."

The credits begin with a cut to another more delightful stage in post-game ritual. Coyly hidden behind the words and obtrusively blurred by filtered lenses, the camera drifts into the girl's locker room like a male fantasy. It tracks slowly amidst their steamy bodies as they proliferate, repeating each other's gestures and turns, bending and lifting to dress their nude bodies. The process is prolonged by slow motion, the better to see them, the better to expose their narcissism. Again, de Palma's camera leaves the group to find Carrie alone in the shower: last because of her modesty, or because she's the most self-adoring of them all? There is a cut to a close-up of her upturned face with the shower nozzle spraying her, eyes closed, succumbing to that pleasure. Surely the sequence recalls Marion's shower in PSYCHO. Is the intent to prepare us for a wound, a rush of blood? De Palma cuts to close-ups that reveal all the self-touching gestures soap ads use, and more for when the bar drops on the floor and bounces in slow motion, he cuts to a subjective shot that invites more intimacy, as Carrie's hands now touch her inner thighs. Her body is most her own at this point and yet most fetishized, most erotic for us. It is at this moment that the blood appears, dripping down her leg, to be discovered by her hand. We saw it before she did, and again de Palma plays with our voyeurism and our privilege to be curious and horrified. Marion was slashed by a knife in her shower: where is Carrie's wound? In this key scene we are taunted by her self-discovery--by its isolation and the ways it is prolonged and sexualized--so that its trauma becomes all of these things, and none of them. Finally, in medium shot, Carrie is permitted to connect mind and body. Yet at this point her isolation is complete. Her body itself has punished her: "Help me," she screams at the nymphets, now shocked out of their stupors. The camera tracks toward them as they assemble--spontaneous militants chanting in unison: "Plug it up." They bombard Carrie with Tampax and sanitary napkins as she crouches in a corner.

It is at this moment of Carrie's self-hate and the collective barbarism of her peers that her eyes flash for the first time. Her defiant magic is explained by a cut from her crazed face to a subjective shot of the lightbulb on the ceiling overhead. The bulb shatters inexplicably, the mob is quieted, and the rescue of Carrie by the gym teacher begins. Miss Collins can only threaten to deprive her girls of what they want most to do--attend their senior prom. Now the teacher can use her authority to prevent her students from attending what is for her a fondest memory. This gesture--motivated by what we come to see as this older woman's loneliness--propels the narrative to its bloody end. The film makes no effort to suggest that her authoritarianism results from her job, her relationship to it and to the organization of her work place. Her loneliness itself seems to be a kind of inborn flaw--she couldn't keep that high school sweetheart on the string. The lockerroom scene, with its scapegoat-mob interaction stemming from adolescent self-discovery, thus gives impetus to Carrie's telekinetic powers as a form of revenge and to the punitive blindness of a teacher whose misguided rage simply fits another kind of female stereotype. Essentially, it is the sexuality of a woman that controls her. Furthermore, it separates her from other women and is the very reason why neither role models nor close relationships are possible. From the outset of this film, de Palma systematically eliminates the possibility that female behavior can be understood in terms of socioeconomic phenomena. His narrative relies on images of blood and fetishized body parts (the prom night blood-bath occurs just after an extreme close up of Chris' lips as her tongue hungrily caresses her red mouth) that serve to remind us that the primacy of a woman's fragmented sexual identity is only a microcosm of her social desolation.

De Palma's subjection of women to the ravages of their physical-physiological natures is also articulated in the ways by which he structures the film around the opposition of two institutions which influence and ultimately control the adolescent Carrie. Through elaborate mise-en-scene and rococco camera the film pretends to

distinguish home from school, contrasting and finally denying those spheres which women may control. Carrie and her mother share a tiny, oddly non-suburban turn-of-the-century bungalow. Another clunky comment on Norman Bates' (PSYCHO) more massive mausoleum, this little house is stuffed with relics and grim knickknacks--a parody of the crazed collector in woman. Property chokes and clutters the mad mind of Mrs. White, providing another pretext for De Palma's virtuosity. She is never understood as anything but a freak who took the Bible too seriously for her own good, and is finally killed by her own Bean-ex in the heartland of her little home. Like all the women in the film, she brings on her own destruction: she is punished for being a woman. There is a day-glo Last Supper on the wall and candle-lit suffering wax figurines on every surface. This private world of kitsch is our explanation of Mrs. White's fanatacism--all necessary for her pardon from God: first for the "curse of blood," then for her own lust and submission. Carrie is thus her mother's shame personified, and by some extraordinary leap (involving our notions of women-in-the-home, spiders waiting in their self-made traps), we are manipulated to believe that self-ignorance and telekinetic powers are her environmental and genetic inheritance. Rather than explode the real horrors of family dogma and parental authority, de Palma again relishes the sensual self-destruction of women who are ultimately privatized out of the productive world and into their own craziness. The baroque lighting, the weaving of the camera imply the final stages in the ritual of "homemaking," but we learn nothing about the workings of that institution.

In the public sphere, where Carrie is a senior at Bates (ugh) High, again the film averts the possibility of exploring another mode of institutionalized authority. The repressive aspects of this place are most specifically focused on in the person of Carrie's gym teacher, Miss Collins. And while she is the opposite of Mrs. White, who wears long shrouds that hide even her ankles, this tall athletic woman who trots about braless and in track shorts is another victim of sexual frustration. There is no attempt to characterize the school hierarchy beyond typing the principal as a foolish lecher and the English teacher as a prissy baby. Once we associate Miss Collins' lithe body with her authoritarian command over her female students, we are invited to fit her into the pattern as another woman whose lack of heterosexual fulfillment explains her entire identity and behavior. De Palma's tracking camera moves past the sweating girls lined up for their punitive work-out and records their puffing chests and tired thighs with the same relish he had displayed for the lockerroom vision. Miss Collins' voice controls and coordinates their movements--she is angry and so are they. It becomes more and more clear throughout the narrative that her desire to "rescue" Carrie has more to do with her own sense of unhappiness with being a woman and teaching women than with any understanding of what society has done to them all. Miss Collins' special punishment for the blood-thirsty Chris--forbidding her to attend her own prom--brings on the final catastrophe that eliminates the senior class. Thus these two seemingly opposite women must share responsibility for the Hellish night. The gym teacher's institutionalized authority which victimizes her students and herself, is explained purely in terms of her physical nature. Neither Miss Collins nor Carrie's mother feel anything but loathing for the sexual awakening that takes place among the adolescent girls who surround them. Their mistrust forms the basis on which we are asked to accept the impossibility of positive female relationships.

The final stage in this punishment of women by women is of course Carrie's act of colossal monstrousness. Publicly splashed with pig blood, Carrie has a second moment of discovery that matches her horror in the shower episode. The gradual awareness of her position as a grotesque mockery of a prom queen is again conveyed with slow motion, and once again the camera fixates on her magic eyes, a split screen revealing that each of her stares can call forth the powers of nature to burn, drown, and hurl her victims through the air. As with each scene involving the self-victimization of women, de Palma's techniques run away with him while they reveal for us the essential ideology of the film. The prom night disaster is his moment of ultimate self-congratulation: he indulges in all the flashy tricks he knows--a 360° craning-pan shot of the prom king and queen: a mise-en-scene (often a rear projection display of blurred lights and faces and streamers) that includes every prom icon; the split screen; and lots of sound devices that alternately lull, seduce, and leave us in horrid silence. As de Palma indulges and delights us with this display of female rage, it brings to mind the comment of a reputable late 19th century medical doctor (Dr. Weir Mitchell) concerning the pleasure of treating sick women: "The man who does not know sick women does not know women."[3] CARRIE is thus a hymn to that inborn sickness, which de Palma attributes to the female power to reproduce and destroy. De Palma's own attitude informs the very structure and imagery of the film--by sexualizing and mystifying this dread dualism of destruction tied to women's reproductive power, he invites us to enjoy it as a spectacle and a travesty of growing up female.

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[1]Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, "Witches, Midwives, and Nurses, a History of Women Healers," The Feminist Press, 1973, p. 15.

[2]Janice Delaney and Mary Jane Lupton and Mary Toth, *The Curse* (New York, 1976), p. 10.

[3]Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, "Complaints and Disorders, the Sexual Politics of Sickness," The Feminist Press, 1973, p. 25. ■

CARRIE meets MARATHON MAN

--Michelle Citron

John Schlesinger's MARATHON MAN is a slick Hollywood thriller, another in the long line of male rite of passage films in the tradition of THE GRADUATE, STRAWDOGS, and THE GODFATHER. As such, it is boring and trite. CARRIE is Hollywood's latest psychic horror film. It follows in the tradition of THE EXORCIST, THE OMEN, and PSYCHIC KILLER. As such, it is mildly interesting in that Brian de Palma, the director, has a good visual eye. CARRIE is also a female rite of passage film, and this is very unusual and also very interesting. Taken together, MARATHON MAN and CARRIE offer two cultural artifacts that clearly spell out what it means to grow up male and female in American culture.

MARATHON MAN concerns Babe Levy (Dustin Hoffman), a brilliant graduate student in history. Emotionally immature and experientially naive, he is trying desperately to exorcise the demons of his past: his father, a brilliant historian, who commited suicide amidst the pressures of the McCarthy witch hunts and an older brother, Doc (Roy Scheider), who is suave, sophisticated and successful -- all the things that Babe is not. Unknown to Babe, Doc is a CIA-type agent whose death plunges Babe into a web of international intrigue involving Szell (Laurence Olivier), arch-evil Nazi dentist war criminal.

Szell murders Doc and then goes after Babe for information, which Babe doesn't even possess, with delicate dental torture perfected in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. After torture, escape, killings, and a final confrontation with Szell himself, Babe changes from an innocent child to a man, the world's evils and childhood devils purged by the process.

Carrie is also innocent and naive, a shy high school student who one day gets her period in the gym shower room. Since her neurotic oppressive mother never told her about menstruation, she panics at the sight of blood flowing down between her legs. The women in her class, who dislike her anyway, viciously make fun of her, bombarding her with tampax and ridicule. After the young women are punished by Miss Collins (Betty Buckles), the kind gym teacher, they plot revenge on Carrie. They get her invited to the Senior prom, have her crowned Prom Queen, and then as she stands in all her radiant glory before the senior class -- accepted by them for the first time -- they dump a huge bucket of pig's blood on her. But Carrie possesses telekinetic powers and, at the height of her humiliation, she unleashes this power in a horrifying revenge destroying students, teachers, Miss Collins, her mother and even herself.

These two films are clearly about rites of passage. At first Babe and Carrie are childish in comparison to other characters in the films and to themselves at the end of the films. Although Babe is a 25 year old grad student at Columbia University, he is a 'babe' in the ways of the world. Some of his child-like traits are cute. For example, when he finally gets a date with mysterious, beautiful Elsa (Marthe Keller) after a pursuit in which his incompetence with women is apparent, he walks down the hall clicking his heels, jumping for joy. Later he defiantly and playfully gargles with wine to annoy the more sophisticated Doc. When confronted with a difficult situation, he often slips into memories of his unresolved past or fantasies of the great marathon runner Abebe Bikila. He dreams of being a hero.

On the other hand, Babe is powerless. He lacks information—he doesn't know what Doc really does. He is easily intimidated: by his history seminar professor when being questioned about his dissertation, by Janeway, Szell's double-crossing associate/lover, during interrogation after Doc's death. He is naively trusting to a dangerous extent and thus he is duped by everyone as seen in both Janeway's and Elsa's manipulation of him. But by the end of the film all of these traits have been replaced by more "adult" ones. Through the obligatory acts of violence of a rite of passage, Babe learns to live in a real world, self-assured and trusting no one but himself.

Carrie too is naive, insecure, and powerless at first. She is completely uninformed about sex and normal bodily functions. She looks like a child with her long, straight hair, loose-fitting, baby-blue jumper, and short-sleeved white blouse. She deals with the taunts of her peers by cowering in the corner of the shower like a wounded animal.

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When approached by Tom for a date, she looks terrified and runs away. And even though she suspects that the class is making a fool of her, she does not trust her instincts.

Getting her period is a very tangible passage from childhood to womanhood. Afterwards, we see subtle and continuous changes that suggest Carrie is becoming an adult. She begins to stand up to her mother, going to the prom against the mother's wishes. She becomes more 'womanly' in appearance, buying lipstick, curling her hair, and wearing a clinging satin gown to the prom. With her period also comes her power (the breaking of the light bulb in the shower), which increases in strength as the film unfolds until it reaches its apex when she brings the heavens crashing down upon her house.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The parent/child relationship in the two films (mother/daughter, father/son) is very different and very telling. Carrie White's relationship to her mother (Piper Laurie) is seen as totally oppressive. Margaret White is a repressed, fanatical Christian. With her wild hair, her crumbling old house, and her fundamentalist attitudes towards religion and life, she is out of sync with the culture she and Carrie live in: upper middle class America symbolized by immaculately dressed and coiffured suburban women, split-level houses, and spoiled, oversexed children. Going from suburban house to suburban house preaching the gospel to bored housewives, she is more than just old-fashioned, she is evil. Instead of explaining menstruation and sex to Carrie, Mrs. White forces her daughter to read religious passages: "The sins of women," "Eve was weak and God visited her with a curse til the ends of her days." She then drags Carrie, kicking and screaming, into a broom closet fitted out as a small shrine in which Carrie must stay until she has adequately prayed for forgiveness. Mrs. White's actions are seen as an incredible psychological abuse of her child who does not know how to fight back.

Margaret White has stunted her daughter's growth, which results in the destructive unleashing of Carrie's powers. If she had told Carrie about menstruation, the shower incident and all subsequent actions would not have occurred. She cares much more about the "sin" than she does about her daughter's happiness. When Carrie goes crying to her for comfort after the prom, Margaret accuses her of being a pawn of the devil and stabs her. This situation contrasts sharply with that of Sue, a peer of Carrie's, who at the end of the film screams out in pain from a nightmare and is held and comforted by her mother. We are led to conclude that Margaret White is the evil ultimately responsible for the destruction which occurs.

As a parent, Professor Levy stunted Babe's growth. Babe at 25 is still haunted by the past, and unable to transcend the shadow of his father, a brilliant, respected scholar. Yet Professor Levy was not evil. In a flashback, he is seen in a loving interaction with the young Babe. Even Doc's remarks that "the old man was a drunk," serve only to give him qualities of human weakness. We can readily imagine someone cracking under the strain of the McCarthy witch hunts. Many did. While the father's alcoholism and suicide are not laudable, neither are they totally unsympathetic. He is seen as a positive force (or at least a surmountable obstacle) in Babe's life because Babe is able to throw away his past at the end of the film and walk away a man. Margaret White is a negative force, causing Carrie to destroy herself and everyone else.

We only see Babe's father in flashback. By having the father's image mediated through the eyes of other characters (Babe, Doc, Professor Biesenthal), his traits are seen more as reflections of the reminiscing characters than of the man himself. In contrast, Margaret White is shown objectively, unmediated by others. Her weaknesses are hers alone, ones which we, the audience, readily see for ourselves,--a device which reinforces the evilness of her character.

SIBLING/MENTORS

Both Babe and Carrie have sibling/mentors--Babe had Doc; Carrie has the gym teacher who care for their younger counterparts. However both mentors are limited. Doc underestimates Babe and never tells him his true profession or why he distrusts Elsa. Thus Babe has no reason to trust Doc's actions; he doesn't understand them. Miss Collins' shortsighted judgement underestimates the students' strong reaction to their punishment and she mistrusts Sue's attempt to stop the blood prank. The teacher's motives are good but she is ineffective.

Doc and Miss Collins serve the same function only superficially. Doc's limitations lead only to his own death, which functions as the catalyst for Babe's growth. Miss Collins' limitations lead to massive destruction. And Miss Collins' death shows us that Carrie really is vicious in her revenge.

POWER

The definition of power differs radically for the male and female protagonists in the two films. The films' general structures are the same: both Carrie and Babe start off powerless and then grow into adulthood and power. What differs is the power's source, its use, and treatment within the films.

Carrie's power comes from without: it is mystical and supernatural. Telekinesis is something we do not understand, so Carrie's power

seems awesome and overwhelming. Thus it is much easier to identify with the victims of this esoteric power than it is to identify with its owner. Its cinematic manifestation, filmed in split screen with red filters, increases our alienation. In one sense Carrie never gains power; rather, she is an unwilling victim of it. Unlike Babe, she cannot be credited with the power she possesses. She is just its vessel.

As a mysterious power, it also reinforces the myth of the fearful power of women (especially because the power is linked to menstruation and sexuality). The "teeth in the cunt!" The all-consuming vagina!

Babe's power is entirely different. He is placed in a world where people have power, the sources of which are readily understandable: money (diamonds), government (the CIA, Nazi Germany), guns, physical strength, intellectual knowledge. It is the type of power, the film tells us, a powerless male can attain if he is moral and strong.

Babe is the source of his own power; it is very human and always there. As Szell says, "Your brother was incredibly strong, sometimes strength is inherited." Babe has only to release it by being true to himself. Professor Biesenthal told him, "You can't fill his (your father's) footsteps. I'm sorry to tell you. You may end up leaving larger tracks, anything's possible, but they will be your own, not your father's." Babe's tracks do end up being larger, for he displays the courage his father lacked.

Babe's powerlessness is something we can identify with, and so his attainment of power at the end of the film perpetuates the myth that we too, as individuals, can become powerful. The film's central metaphor of the marathon is appropriate because the marathon is a very individualistic, private sport, and Babe's heroism is very individualistic. The recurring marathon sequence we see in the film is of Abebe Bikila, the Ethiopian cop who won the marathon in the Japanese Olympics running barefoot against the favored runners from Russia and Germany, countries with big athletic machines. Babe also wins against large forces. He single-handedly kills four men and rescues himself despite many traps and false friends. He embodies the American myth of everyman as lone hero. If Babe can do it, so can we.

This myth of individualist fulfillment is further reinforced by a contrast made throughout the film between Americans as symbolized by Babe, and Europeans, as symbolized by the more continental Doc and Szell. Szell's first view of America is the result of a baggage strike at the airport. Luggage is strewn all over the ground and the passengers are poking around for their belongings. In the center of the frame are Mr. and Mrs. America coming home from their South American vacation with straw hats, bright shirts and souvenirs. They are loud and frivolous, especially juxtaposed to Szell and what he represents. Szell sneers about America, "Land of plenty. Always so confident God was on their side. Now I think they're not so sure." Ultimately, of course, God IS on our side for Babe is victorious over Szell. The airport is chaotic, just like Babe's messy, chaotic room, which Doc calls an "armpit of a place." The dirty sheets and dirty glasses contrast strongly with the impeccable style of Doc's room. When they go to a very classy, continental restaurant for lunch, Doc talks of truffles and wine, suggesting Babe would probably prefer to eat at MacDonalds, the ultimate symbol of America.

Babe's power is very male, hooked to government, politics, WWII, and money. And its maleness is symbolized by his father's gun. At first Babe keeps it wrapped in a white towel, hidden in a desk drawer, a symbol of his father's and his own weak manhood. In his showdown with Janeway and Elsa after his torture by Szell, Babe arrogantly cocks the gun and holds it straight out at arms length like a rigid phallus. At the end of the film, when he is safe and secure in his proven manhood, he is able to throw the gun away.

The women in MARATHON MAN reflect this point of view of male power. Elsa is the only signifi-

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cant woman in the film. The treacherous, deceiving woman, she first facilitates Babe's mugging and later leads him into a trap.

THE END

Finally we must ask: what does it mean to be a man or a woman in this culture? For Babe, a man is defined as someone who is both moral (capable of making the correct choices) and courageous (being both worldly intelligent and being able to act). Throughout MARATHON MAN Babe is surrounded by male models, each of whom presents a piece of the male definition, none of whom are complete themselves. Babe's father is moral but not courageous, brilliant but unable to survive. Doc is courageous but not moral. He is strong, as even Szell admits, barehandedly fighting off his murderous assailant early in the film. He is also cunning, able to sense the evil in Elsa. But he is not moral.

Szell also has a strong moral code, but one which is evil. Babe's final test is his confrontation with Szell in the pump house. He does not sell out, refusing Szell's bribe of diamonds. Neither is he able to kill Szell (despite his evilness) in cold blood. Only when provoked by Szell, "You're too weak. Your father was weak in his way, your brother in his. And you're weak too. You're all so predictable," does Babe have the motivation to kill. His new-found manhood has been challenged and he must prove himself by killing Szell. When Szell dies, Babe is able to leave the pump house, throw away his father's gun, the symbol of his unresolved manhood, and turn around and *walk* in the direction he has always run from.

For Carrie, to become a woman is to unleash evil, not destroy it. Prior to the menstrual scene we see a long sequence in which Carrie washes herself in the shower. Seen through diffusion filters and in slow motion, Carrie is a luscious, sensual creature, innocently soaping her breasts, rubbing between her legs, turning up her face to catch the water flowing from the phallic shower head. The shots linger over her body in voyeuristic close-ups. Suddenly there is blood. Carrie has just entered into the world of the adult woman.

Carrie's world also exhibits various female roles. Her mother is a psychotic, evil woman who cannot deal with her own or her daughter's sexuality. Susie's mother is a bored housewife leading an empty life watching the soaps and drinking scotch. Miss Collins is kindhearted (well almost, she does admit to identifying with the hatred the women in the gym class feel towards Carrie for acting so foolish about her period) but not very wise. Carrie's female peers are selfish nymphs, sexually teasing young men into helping with a particularly vicious prank. There is one genuinely nice woman in the film, Sue, who tries to help Carrie. But we, like Miss Collins, are duped into not trusting her actions until it is too late.

It is all summed up with blood. Blood is very central to the rites of passage for both characters. For Carrie it is the horrifying, unexplained menstrual blood dripping down between her legs in the shower as if from an open wound. The pig's blood of humiliation. The oppressive blood of the Christian martyrs dripping out of the wounds of the St. Sebastian statue which adorns her closet sanctuary.

For Babe blood is Doc's courage in overcoming his deadly assailant barehanded and bleeding. And the regrettable but necessary deaths of Doc and his father out of which Babe's manhood rises. And Babe's strength of purpose is proven when he kills real people and not just paper targets.

The moral is clear. To be a man is to become moral and courageous, to rise up victorious out of the evil of the world. To be a woman is to become that evil: uncontrolled and destructive. Throughout MARATHON MAN Szell keeps asking Babe, "Is it safe, is it safe?" No, women, it is not safe.

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1. See M. Claire Kolbenschlag's "Film and The American Experience" for an elaboration of the "Regeneration-Through-Violence" myth. *Jump Cut*, No. 6 (Mar-Ap, 1975)

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TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE
JACKSON COUNTY JAIL
THE GREAT TEXAS DYNAMITE CHASE

The Meat Hook Mama, the Nice Girl, and Butch Cassidy in Drag:

--Mary Mackey

The screen is black. We hear the sound of digging. Suddenly a flash bulb goes off, and, for an instant, something horrible leaps out of the darkness. The audience recognizes that it has just seen a mutilated female head. The non-stop screaming begins. The TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE is underway.

CHAINSAW MASSACRE is a film aimed at the drive-in trade and neighborhood theaters. The audience the day I saw it was mainly composed of working people, about equally divided between blacks, whites, and chicanos. For some reason each person there had paid three dollars to watch one of the most violent films since NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD. It soon became obvious that they had also paid to watch women being tortured in ways that make PSYCHO look like CINDERELLA. The question, of course, is why? Why are violent films so popular, and why are films that involve violence against women some of the most popular of all?

Siegfried Kracauer in his study of the German cinema, *From Caligari to Hitler*, has pointed out that "popular films . . . can . . . be supposed to satisfy existing mass desires," and that they often reflect "those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension of consciousness" (pp. 5 and 6). Certainly CHAINSAW MASSACRE's popularity is due, in part, to the skill with which it bypasses the cerebral cortex. The appeal to subconscious fantasy is everywhere--from the first flickering frames that put the viewer firmly in the realm of sleep, nightmares, and hallucinations; to the great phallic chainsaw itself, grinding through the woods after the heroine like a snaggle-toothed parody of rape. We know from the opening scene that we are about to see a film that can not be analyzed according to the kind of theatrical standard of logic, plot, and characterization that govern a work like, say, NASHVILLE or THE PASSENGER. Instead, as Michael Goodwin noted in his essay on exploitation movies, we are involved here in the aesthetic of dreams (see "Velvet Vampires and Hot Mamas: Why Exploitation Movies Get To Us," *Village Voice*, 7 Jl, 1975, p. 66ff).

The plot of CHAINSAW MASSACRE is relatively simple. Sally Hardesty and her invalid brother, Franklin, are on a country outing with three friends: Sally's boyfriend Jerry, and a couple named Kurt and Pam. One by one, Kurt, Pam, and Jerry wander into a nearby farmhouse, and are suddenly and brutally killed by a maniac in a leather mask who then cuts them up with a chainsaw and turns them into sausage. When Sally and Franklin come to look for the others, Leatherface attacks Franklin in his wheelchair, slicing him up alive. Then, for the rest of the film, he terrorizes Sally, chasing her about with his chainsaw. At one point, Sally escapes him, only to fall into the clutches of his father, brother, and grandfather, who torture her in even more ingenious ways. At the end of the film she escapes by running out to the highway and jumping into the back of a pick-up truck. Leatherface is left alone in the middle of the road doing a macabre dance of death with his chainsaw as the sun rises over Texas.

Some of the subconscious pleasure that the audience gets out of this film may have its origins in class differences. On one level CHAINSAW MASSACRE is a neat economic parable something on the order of H.G. Wells' *Time Machine*. Five well-fed, complacent rich kids have the misfortune to meet up with a working class family that converts them into barbecue. The family, it seems, worked for generations in the local slaughterhouse until automation (the invention, actually, of a new, faster, more humane way to kill the animals) forced wide-spread lay-offs. The unemployed family, showing true American self-reliance, hasn't gone on welfare. Instead, the father has set up a small roadside barbecue stand, and the two sons and the grandfather have proceeded to provide the meat. The meat, in this case, is tourists--a class of people that, as far as the family is concerned, is no different than any other breed of cattle. In this film the poor in order to survive literally eat the rich.

But although every member of the party meets with violence, the nature of the violence is not equally distributed. Two of the men in the film--Kurt and Jerry--are given simple, quick deaths. Leatherface simply steps out from behind a door, and knocks them on the head with a meat mallet before they know what's happened. Although Franklin (the most effeminate of the male characters) is sawed up alive, his death takes place in the dark and, for the most part, off screen. Something far worse and far more graphic is reserved for the women, Pam and Sally.

Pam has the distinction of dying what is probably one of the most brutal deaths a woman has ever died on the screen outside of a Mafia snuff film. Entering a neat little white farmhouse to look for Kurt, she finds herself in a room full of chicken feathers and human bones. A hen in a cage (symbolizing, perhaps, the female principle trapped and fed on by the family) swings over her head, cackling insanely. Confronted by such obvious danger, Pam's response is passivity. While not actually pulling a full-fledged Victorian faint on the order of THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI, nonetheless she lies on the floor, paralyzed with fear, while female members of the audience (who have just seen Kurt get it with the meat mallet seconds before) yell, "get up off your white ass, sister, and run!"

Naturally, under the circumstances, Pam doesn't have much of a headstart when Leatherface finally appears. She makes a feeble attempt to stumble out of the house, but he catches her, picks her up around the bare midriff, and hauls her, kicking and screaming, back inside. This is a scene which, of course, we've all seen before, a scene so common that it's almost become archetypal: the monster (King Kong or perhaps the phantom of the opera) drags the blond back to his lair. But in CHAINSAW MASSACRE the abduction takes a special twist. Returning to his specially equipped kitchen (complete with a cattle ramp and a bank of industrial deep freezes) Leatherface hangs Pam *alive* on a meat hook. Women have often complained that films (like, say, CANDY) have treated them like hunks of meat. But rarely has sexual objectification--to use the mildest term I can think of--been so blatant.

At this point, the CHAINSAW MASSACRE shifts from being a film about violence in America in general, to a film which, for the most part, concerns itself with the varieties of violence men perpetrate against women. There had been some hints early on that this was to be the case. A radio news report, played behind the first few scenes, had reeled off a list of disasters, among which were the story of an eighteen year old girl chained in an attic, and a mass murder in which a woman and a man were killed. The murdered man had been castrated, and his body was first identified by the police as that of a woman.

Texas itself, the location of the film, is the land of male violence *par excellence*. In American folk mythology, Texas, more than any other state, embodies the cowboy ideal of the lone male who carves out a place for himself with his trusty Colt 45. It is the state where the famous tower sniper picked off students at the University in Austin, the state where John Kennedy was killed. For years Texas was famous for being the only state where a man who caught his wife in bed with her lover had an automatic right (you might even

say duty) to shoot her, while a woman who shot her husband under similar circumstances could almost be sure of being convicted of murder.

Women have never counted for very much in Texas, and in the lives of the slaughterhouse family they don't count at all. The family lives in a neat little white frame house that symbolizes, on the outside, all the stable values of home and family, the virtues of a rural, non-industrialized, more innocent America. But the impression of domestic stability and order is only an illusion. There are no women in the family (unless you want to count the stuffed grandmother in the attic), and, thus, the unit has no natural way to grow or reproduce. Having lost contact with the female principle, the men are out of balance with nature. They can not even farm their own land; they become hunters and killers instead.

It is no accident that the most violent genres are the gangster film, the war film, the police film, the horror film, and the cowboy film; it is no accident that such films either exclude women entirely, or include them only as victims. Both Mary Shelley and Wilhelm Reich warned that upsetting the balance between the sexes leads to violence. In *Frankenstein* Shelley points out that when men separate themselves from women and nature they create monsters which ultimately destroy them. Frankenstein himself laments, "if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere . . . with his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually, and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed." Reich, in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* observes that the first thing an authoritarian regime does is to separate men and women, to degrade women, and to channel the unattached sexual impulses of the men into the violence of war.

The aggression of the men against Sally in CHAINSAW MASSACRE takes a number of forms and occupies the entire latter half of the film. To start things off, she is chased through the woods at night by Leatherface, who comes after her wielding his great phallic chainsaw, cutting a swath through the forest in a symbolic rape of nature. When Sally runs into the house, Leatherface tries to saw through the door instead of opening it. At this point, he has become man as pure killer--aggressive, deadly, lumbering forward with the dumb insistance of a natural disaster.

Jumping through an upstairs window (in a scene more than a little reminiscent of the suicide in BIRTH OF A NATION), Sally runs screaming down the road to the barbecue stand. There she encounters the father who first comforts her, propping her up (ominously) on a butcherblock while he strokes her hair like a lover and mumbles reassurances. Then, suddenly shifting character, he tries to tie her up and stuff her in a gunny sack.

Sally, to her credit, puts up a struggle. Unlike Pam, she doesn't wait around for disaster to overtake her. Grabbing a knife from the counter, she tries to attack him. But, like a long line of film heroines before her, she is incapable of actual aggressive violence when the chips are down. The father beats the knife out of her hand with a broom (more about men taking on female symbols later), ties her up in the classic S-M bondage posture, stuffs her in the sack, and dumps her in his pickup. As he drives her back to the farmhouse, he alternately asks her if she is comfortable, and prods her viciously with a stick in still another violent parody of rape.

Of all the men in the family, the father is probably the most disturbing because, at times, he appears to be so normal. If he can comfort Sally one minute, and throw her in a gunny sack the next, then the implication is that any man could be a potential killer. As far as the female viewer is concerned, paranoia has now reached cosmic proportions.

Back at the farmhouse, Sally is tied to an armchair (that comes complete with real human arms) and gagged. The youngest son, a half-wit with a huge red birth mark on his face, begins to torment her, parodying her female postures, and imitating her voice. Leatherface, too, is beginning to take on female characteristics. He appears wearing lipstick and eyeshadow over his leather mask, and a gray old woman's wig. When reprimanded by the father for sawing down the front door, he replies in a high-pitched female voice.

To complete the family circle, the mummified grandfather is lugged down from the attic. Slitting the tips of Sally's fingers, the men insert them into grandfather's mouth. The old man comes alive and begins to suck, an obscene parody of a nursing baby. The female force is obviously being drained to feed the male.

After offering her phallic shaped sausages (made, one assumes, out of Kurt, Jerry, Franklin, and Pam), the men begin to discuss who to "let have her." The sexual implications of the conversation are obvious, and Sally adds to them by promising hysterically to do anything they want if they'll just let her go. One of the functions of violence against women in the cinema (and in real life, for that matter) is to reduce them to just such a state of total compliance. To the men in the audience this fantasy of having absolute power over a woman is no doubt sexually exciting, and one of the reasons for the popularity of the film.

After a bit more squabbling, the men decide to "let granpa have a whack at her." A whack in this instance means a whack with a hammer. Grandfather, according to his proud family, used to be the best killer at the slaughterhouse. But now, with Sally's head held over a corrugated tub like a young heifer, he just can't keep it up. Time and time again the hammer falls impotently out of his hand. During one of his failures, Sally breaks away, jumps through another window, and begins to run again. Revving up his chainsaw, Leatherface chases her out to the highway.

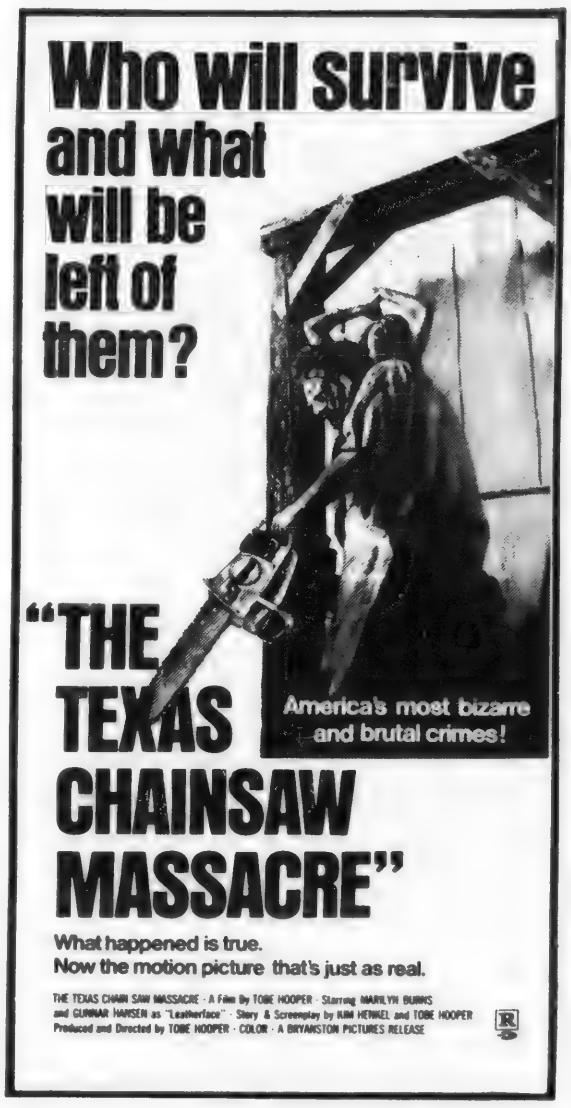
Just in case you haven't gotten the message about women and meat yet, the first vehicle that stops to rescue her is a cattle truck. True to form, Leatherface tries to saw his way through the truck door. The driver, a black man, runs away, throwing a wrench in the maniac's direction. But it's rather like shooting peas at a charging elephant. While the black man is left to the mercy of the family (his fate is never explained in the film) Sally jumps into a blue pickup truck, and is wheeled off into the sunrise, covered with blood and laughing hysterically.

The violence that women are subject to in films like CHAINSAW MASSACRE serves at least three purposes: 1) it allows male members of the audience to feel more powerful than, and, hence, superior to women; 2) it makes them feel indispensable; And 3) it keeps women in their place.

In her classic essay on rape, Susan Griffin points out that "in our culture male eroticism is wedded to power" ("Rape: The All American Crime," *Ramparts,* Vol. 10, No. 3, Sept. 1971, p. 3). The superiority that men feel when they see a woman being dominated in some way on the screen, is, then, merely an extreme exaggeration of the sex roles that our culture considers normal. "Not only should a man be taller and stronger than a female," Griffin notes, "but he must also demonstrate his superior strength in gestures of dominance." A boy, so the myth goes, may become a man by taking either a life or a woman. And to take the life of a woman (especially, as in FRENZY, while raping her) becomes the penultimate masculine act. This is not to say, of course, that on a conscious level all men want to rape women and cut them into spare ribs. But when they see women being brutalized on the screen, over and over again, they are being given, on a subconscious plane at least, graphic proof of their physical and sexual superiority.

At the very least male viewers are being given the feeling that they are indispensable. If the hills are full of maniacs like Leatherface, then any woman who wants to go for a picnic in the country is going to need a protector. As Griffin put it: "in the system of chivalry, men protect women against men. This is not unlike the protection relationship which the mafia established with small businesses in the early part of this century. Indeed, chivalry is an age-old protection racket which depends for its existence on rape" (ibid p. 4).

This brings us to the third, and perhaps most insidious effect of violence against women in the cinema. Like stories of lynchings, it is a social technique designed to frighten an oppressed group of people and keep them in their place. Any woman who has seen CHAINSAW MASSACRE is going to think twice before she goes out to the country--or, for that matter, anywhere--alone. Interestingly enough, extreme graphic violence against women in the cinema has been coeval with the growth of the women's movement, and one might well see in it a kind of conservative backlash against the real threat of female independence. Violence on the screen points out over and over again the regressive moral lesson that women are basically weak,


Who will survive and what will be left of them?
"THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE"
America's most bizarre and brutal crimes!
What happened is true.
Now the motion picture that's just as real.
THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE - A Film By TOBE HOOPER - Starring MARILYN BURNS and GUNNAR HANSEN as "Leatherface" - Story & Screenplay by KIM HENKEL and TOBE HOOPER
Produced and Directed by TOBE HOOPER - COLOR - A BRYANSTON PICTURES RELEASE
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shrieking creatures who, should they venture too far away from a capable male protector, will probably not just be raped (an old fear, no longer sufficient), but probably murdered in some inventively ghastly way by a psychotic sex maniac. The list of examples (SHADOW OF A DOUBT, PSYCHO, CONQUEROR WORM, FRENZY, VIRGIN SPRING, STANLEY, BOSTON STRANGLER, CLOCKWORK ORANGE, DIRTY HARRY, TORSO) is almost endless.

On the other side of the coin, things seem to be improving, if only slightly. For example, Sally, unlike most film heroines who came before her, rescues herself. Esmeralda had to depend on Quasimodo to come swinging down on a rope and save her from the pyre (THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME), but no hero appears at the last minute to shoot it out with Leatherface and take Sally in his arms. By sheer dint of running whenever she has the chance, she gets away under her own steam. In CHAINSAW MASSACRE Sally breaks the old triangle of woman-rapist-protector. Five years ago in such a film, the heroine would probably have either succumbed to the saw (like Babs in FRENZY), or have been rescued by a man at the last minute (like Lila in PSYCHO).

Yet, in the final analysis, outrunning your pursuer isn't really good enough. Since violence against women in the cinema is, as we have seen, often more a matter of power than of sex, the issue at stake ultimately is not merely survival, but control. Usually, of course, the control of the situation is almost entirely with the male. On the screen men act, and women react. Dr. Rotwang hunts and Maria hides (METROPOLIS); King Kong paws and Fay Wray dodges; Leatherface revs up his saw, and Sally runs screaming. In some recent films, however, the traditional balance of power has been shifting. Something like JACKSON COUNTY JAIL, for example, suggests that the old game may turn out to be more complicated than anyone had imagined. It's still death before dishonor, of course. But these days the death occasionally turns out to be his instead of hers.

In JACKSON COUNTY JAIL, Dinah (Yvette Mimieux), leaves an unsatisfying job and a philandering husband, and begins a cross-country drive from California to New York. As we all know from seeing EASY RIDER, the space in between the two is Redneckland, and anyone fool enough to set foot into the Interior (as opposed to flying over it at a sanitary 30,000 feet) is liable to be murdered or worse.

Such is the case with Dinah. Her first mistake is to pick up a pregnant speed freak and her psychotic boyfriend. After having a brief conversation with Dinah's avacado plant, the nice young couple stick her up at gunpoint and steal her car. Mimieux then enters a Redneckland bar to phone the police. A mistake of course. Because she lacks a dime (obviously her mother never told her to tape mad money into the toe of her shoe) the bartender is able to coax her into the backroom and attack her. In the course of fending him off, she herself is arrested by a local police officer for (believe it or not) swearing. Once in jail she encounters a parade of stereotypes. First she meets the good sheriff who offers her candy and comforts her; then she has a run-in with the bad deputy who feeds her wieners (after this and CHAINSAW MASSACRE I'm giving up hot dogs for life), and rapes her.

The rape is brutal and graphic, and--despite the supposedly redeeming violence which comes

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THE MIDNIGHT MOVIES

the woman never gets to shoot it out
only the hero who rescues her
two dogs fighting over a bone
while she lies with the wet towel
stuffed in her mouth
the taxi driver hero
redeems her with his blood
the menstruation from the neck
makes the man

she is on the cliff or under the saw
tied to the tracks or the stake
chained to a chair with human arms
held over an iron washtub
the young heifer
with the blood-matted hair
waiting for the mallet to fall again

the man with the blue silk tie
strangles her while she prays
deliver us from evil
father forgive them
he hangs her on the meat hook
he hangs up the pin-up
of the naked woman over the bar
flank steak and loin
tattooed on her body

the false eyelashes,
the rubber breasts
cunts for sale in the porno store
a hank of hair and a piece of bone
getting a piece of ass
a juicy little piece

he loved girls it said
in the preview of coming attractions
he loved girls
but not in one piece.

Mary Mackey

next--it is obviously the high point of the film. In all the advertisements for JACKSON COUNTY JAIL Dinah is shown limp on an iron cot in the jail cell, her dress pulled up around her thighs. There is no sign that she is about to attack the deputy, though in the film attack him she does. A few minutes after the rape (and why, one wonders not before or during), Mimieux runs amuck, picks up a heavy three-legged stool, and beats the rapist to a pulp.

The widely publicized cases of Inez Garcia, who shot the man who raped her, and Joanne Little, the black southern woman who killed the jail guard who raped her while threatening her with an ice pick, are obviously the inspiration for this scene. But the fact that Mimieux is neither black nor chicano seriously undermines the credibility of the whole incident. In the first place, it is difficult to believe that she could have ever been jailed in the first place. She is white, well-dressed, wealthy, and it's almost impossible to imagine that she doesn't have a lawyer back in California who could spring her with a single phone call. The whole film is built on the cliche "What's a nice girl like her doing in a place like this?" And the only reasonable answer to that question is that she couldn't have really been there.

Even setting that objection aside for the moment, the significance of Dinah's attack on her rapist is seriously undermined by the way in which it occurs. There is no sense of any real, conscious assumption of power here. It is still the old female reaction in place of action. Dinah kills the guard in a frenzy, by accident, in a fit of momentary insanity. JACKSON COUNTY JAIL thus continues to support the old theory that nice girls (and Dinah, remember, is the nicest of the nice) are only aggressive when they are 1) defending their young, or 2) out of their minds.

Since Dinah now belongs to the latter category, she obviously needs a keeper, and the film gallantly provides one for her in the form of the ex-convict in the next cell. For the rest of the film, the convict acts as a combination guide, father figure, and guru, filling her in on the realities of life on the run. At the end of the film, when he is shot down with heavy-handed symbolism during a Bicentennial parade, the camera zooms in on Dinah sitting in a police car staring through the windows with a blank look in her eyes. The pane of glass between her and the outside world suggests that she has not escaped, but merely exchanged one cage for another, traded in her old keeper (the convict) for a new keeper (the State). Any chance of her controlling her own life in the future appears to be about as remote as Minnie Mouse pulling off a coup d'etat.

In contrast to Sally and Dinah, Claudia Jennings and Jocelyn Jones who play a pair of female bank robbers in THE GREAT TEXAS DYNAMITE CHASE (original title: DYNAMITE WOMEN) are made of altogether different stuff. Take, for example, the way they handle the sexual advances of a horny highway patrol officer who pulls them over to the side of the road, and demands that they either have sex with him or pay a stiff fine. Here we have all the possibilities of another JACKSON COUNTY JAIL: a man with a gun, a lonely country road, and two defenseless women. Only in this case, it turns out that the women are far from defenseless.

Ellie Joe (Jones) takes the officer off into the bushes and gets his pants down around his knees while her partner, Candy (Jennings) sneaks up and neatly disarms him. The two then proceed to chain the hysterical officer to a tree with his own handcuffs (in, by the way, the S-M posture usually reserved for women), and leave a burning stick of dynamite stuck in the ground between his legs. Although the dynamite never actually goes off (one of the pleasures of this film is that there is so much violence with so little loss of human life), the audience is treated to several minutes of the officer making a fool of himself as he alternately begs for mercy, and trips over his pants trying to stamp out the dynamite.

Obviously what we have here is a reversal of the ordinary sex roles. Highway patrolmen in bondage are as rare in the cinema as active, aggressive women. In fact, when you inspect THE GREAT TEXAS DYNAMITE CHASE closely you discover that--except for a few minor changes in plot--it is nothing more or less than BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID in drag. In this case, the two bank robbers are not cowboys, but women, and it is this reversal of sexual expectations that gives the film its special comic flair. After all, who ever heard of women robbing banks without the help of some men. Bonnie had Clyde, and even Ma Barker had her pack of sons.

Even more amazing than their bank robbing is Candy and Ellie Joe's friendship. On the screen women usually either compete with each other or, occasionally, try to kill each other (THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES, REBECCA, UNDER CAPRICORN). But Candy and Ellie Joe, like Butch and Sundance, are real buddies who stick together despite great personal danger. Their comradeship is tested several times in the film. At the beginning Candy has a chance to leave Ellie Joe and settle down with a miner in the mountains--a chance she refuses. The miner, by the way, is also a reversal of the "beautiful blonde" of ordinary gangster films. In this case I suppose he should be referred to as the "gorgeous hunk," since his habit of running around in bluejeans with no shirt probably does the same thing for female members of the audience that a woman in a bikini would do for males.

Ellie Joe is tempted in a similar way by another reversal: the "sweet young thing." Like the schoolteacher in BUTCH CASSIDY the "sweet young thing" pleads with her to settle down and give up her life of crime before she gets killed. In this case the sweet young thing is Slim, a nice mild-mannered guy who is played by Johnny Crawford

Violence done to women on the screen is often used as an excuse for even more excessive masculine violence (DIRTY HARRY, STRAW DOGS). In light of this pattern it seems appropriate that the murder of Slim in this sexually upside down world is the occasion for the only really graphic violence in the entire film. The incident occurs in the middle of a picnic. Ellie Joe and Slim are sitting on the grass (in a scene that once again brings back echoes of BONNIE AND CLYDE), when two police officers jump out of the bushes and shoot Slim down in cold blood. Candy, who has witnessed the entire slaughter from the sidelines, proceeds to kill the two policemen, not with dynamite, but with a gun.

Her choice of weapons is significant. All through the film, dynamite has been associated with a violence that doesn't really hurt anyone--a female, orgasmic violence, diffuse, unreliable, and essentially harmless. But at the end, when she really wants to kill instead of merely frightening, Candy turns for the first time to that supreme phallic weapon, the gun.

The third, and ultimate test of Candy and Ellie's friendship comes near the end of the film when they pull their last bank job. In the chase Candy is wounded, and Ellie Joes has the choice of either leaving her and escaping to Mexico, or staying to shoot it out with the law. But by this time we know that Ellie Joe could no more leave Candy than Butch could leave Sundance, Cisco could leave Poncho, or Tonto could leave the Lone Ranger.

Wiring a car with dynamite she sends it smashing into the police who scatter before it explodes. Then Ellie throws Candy onto a horse, and the two of them ride off into the sunset, to Mexico and freedom. The credits at the end tell us that they are now living in Mexico with lots of boyfriends and plenty of money.

A fairy tale ending, of course, about an ending that still doesn't solve a lot of my questions about women and violence in the cinema. Do we want, for example, to see women taking on masculine roles in films? Do we want an equality of terror? It's hard to say. But after seventy years of whips, meat hooks, and chainsaws, one thing is clear. It's a pleasure to see two women successfully dynamite out a place for themselves on the screen. ■

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SPECIAL SECTION

Eisenstein's OCTOBER

--Murray Sperber

INTRODUCTION

Sergei Eisenstein, in the first decade of the Soviet Union and his own first decade in the cinema, was deeply committed to Marxism. This fact, so obvious in Eisenstein's films of the 1920's, is denied or distorted by most critics of his work.

Politicos often attack or apologize for him in "vulgar Marxist" or "vulgar Free World" terms: e.g., the Stalinist and American Legion charges against him during his lifetime (OCTOBER was considered particularly "deviationist" and "subversive"), and the Soviet Union's veneration of him in safe death. The majority of writers, including many of the luminaries of film criticism, evaluate Eisenstein mainly for his technical achievements and failures, and his place in film history; that he happened to make movies about political revolution appears in their eyes inconsequential compared to his innovations in film direction and editing. This aesthete position gained momentum in the West during the Cold War when the safest way to discuss film--or any art--was in formalist terms. And when film came to the academy, film teachers and historians, codifying and clubifying their language and discipline also felt most comfortable discussing the director out of political context and in terms of a mystified film history: e.g., partially influenced by Griffith but little impact upon Hitchcock, etc.

Since the study of actual history is difficult and the more distant and foreign the period--e.g., the Soviet 1920's--the greater the problems, and since an idealist approach to film (film as an art object) is generally easier than a materialist one (what actually occurred and why), aesthetic criticism of Eisenstein continues. But denying an artist's political content is a highly political, albeit conservative act: if Eisenstein's films are art objects, then we can ignore his political--i.e. Marxist--messages. Although in the last half century a number of critics, mainly French, have inquired into the connections between politics and art in his work, their impact upon film criticism, especially British and American, has been negligible (for the best of the French writing, see the special double issue of *Cahiers du Cinema*, Jan.-Feb., 1971). The purpose of this essay, therefore, is not to add to the existing criticism on Eisenstein but to shift the discussion, to consider him in terms of his Marxism, i.e., to try to understand his use of dialectical materialism and to evaluate whether and how he translated it into cinema. Only in this way do Eisenstein's triumphs, as well as his failures, become intelligible.

PHOTO: Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, NYC

THE CRITICISM OF *OCTOBER*

Part of the problem for Western critics and viewers is that the subject of Eisenstein's OCTOBER--the 1917 Russian Revolution--is unfamiliar. Furthermore, the print of the film they see is butchered and far from the director's intention (in foreign distribution, especially in America, the film was cut and even censored in various ways; the usual Western version is both distorted and at least 1,200 meters shorter than the original Moscow print). Even the usual title, TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD, is incorrect: Eisenstein always called his work OCTOBER, but the German distributor renamed it TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD after John Reed's famous eyewitness account of the Revolution (one of Eisenstein's many sources).

In discussing the film, it is important to use the best print available in the West (the French S.N.A. version, the closest to the original Moscow print). And to help the reader understand the action better, to retrieve the past, in a sense, it is useful to provide on-going identifications of the historical persons and events. Although cumbersome at times, this positivist approach supplies the facts of the film, facts upon which any understanding and comment should be--but have not been--based.

OCTOBER has always been a problem film, for Eisenstein, his viewers, and especially critics. From its premiere, the film has served more as a Rohrshach for critics' projections than as a work seen and understood in its own terms. Mordaunt Hall, the reviewer for the *New York Times*, found it "clever, but a bore. It is kaleidoscopic... His masters, the Soviet, get their due." Then, in complete disregard of the images of the screen, he states; "Mr. Eisenstein revels in showing the pillaging of Bolshevik troops as they found their hobnailed boots for the first time on the waxed floors of a palace" (Nov. 3, 1928, p. 24).

Even critics predisposed in favor of the Soviet Union and its cinema complain of the film's "rococo discursiveness and its lack of organized dramatic development" (Alexander Bakshy, *The Nation*, Dec. 28, 1928, p. 721) and maintain that "OCTOBER has no central slant. It is built up out of a collection of what might be called imaginary news reels. It darts about Russia, rushes through time, skips whole pages of history to fasten its frenzied eye in turn on...etc" (Robert Littell, *The New Republic*, Nov. 21, 1928, p. 17).

The standard critical line on OCTOBER was soon established: "The film as a whole is difficult and incoherent" (William Hunter, *Scrutiny of Cinema*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1932, p. 31). Critics, especially in America, did have the problem of seeing butchered versions of the film; nevertheless, one suspects that even if they had viewed the original Moscow print, they probably would not have understood the film any better.

The problem for most critics is that they have been unwilling or unable to see the film in dialectical terms. Eisenstein described OCTOBER as "the first embryonic step towards a totally new form of film expression;" he called this form the "intellectual film" and he based its methodology on his interpretation of Marxism (*Film Form*, New York, 1949, p. 63). To analyze Eisenstein's OCTOBER, we must first understand his theoretical premises and then examine whether he was able to render them cinematically. If we apply Western film values and sit passively in the dark, regarding OCTOBER as simply another sequence of moving celluloid, we watch the movie through a distorted lens. If we gain entrance to the world of OCTOBER, its political and cinematic meanings, we begin to see Eisenstein's work, walk around its filmscape, participate in it, and achieve a new and richer understanding.

EISENSTEIN'S FILM THEORY AND HIS PLANS FOR *OCTOBER*

Eisenstein not only made movies but he wrote about the cinema in a detailed and original manner. In one of his most important essays, "A Dialectical Approach to Film Form," written one year after completing OCTOBER, he tried to explain his sense of dialectical materialism and its application to film (his main example was OCTOBER). Eisenstein began by stating:

> The foundation of this philosophy is a dynamic concept of things:
> Being--as a constant evolution from the interaction of two contradictory opposites.
> Synthesis--arising from the opposition between thesis and antithesis. (*Film Form,* 45).

Eisenstein believed that "art is always conflict" (his italics) and that montage captures conflict on the screen. By montage, he does not mean only the editing and arranging of film, but a much deeper dynamic: "By collision. By the conflict of two pieces of film in opposition to each other . . . from the collision of two given factors arises a concept" (Ibid., 37). He rejects the linear editing and narratives of his colleagues, Pudovkin ("linkage") and Kuleshov ("brick-by-brick composition") because their "approach overrules dialectical development, and dooms one to mere evolutionary 'perfecting,' in so far as it gives no bite into the dialectical substance of events" (Ibid., 37).

Dialectical montage cannot be confined to editing single shots, it must connect to the "organicness" of the whole work. In his later essay, "The Structure of the Film," he argues that "organicness can be defined by the fact that the work as a whole is governed by a certain law of structure and that all its parts are subordinated to this canon" (Ibid., 161). In the essay, he shows how in POTEMKIN he worked dialectically, seeking the dynamic quality within the whole work, then carefully connecting sections to sequences and sequences to individual shots.

In the same way, his conception for OCTOBER was dialectical. He constructed his shooting script in five act form (he had done the same in POTEMKIN); he began each act with a thesis, set up its antithesis, and at the end of the act, resolved the conflict with a synthesis which became, at the opening of the next act, the new thesis. Dialectical conflict characterizes each part of the act and frequently each sequence and even each shot. (See S.M. Eisenstein, *Octobre: découpage intégral,* Editions de l'Avant-Scène, Paris, 1971.)

The script, like the film, opens with the symbols of the old order, the supposedly timeless power of Tsarist Russia. Immediately, the oppressed Russian masses challenge the Tsarist thesis. The first six shots of the script are of gold and jewels, the Tsar's crown, sceptre and imperial globe; the next seven shots are of starving crowds of women, machine-like workers, and bent peasants; and the next two shots read: "And the crown begins to tarnish and fade. Then the blinding brilliance disappears" (*October*, p. 12). Within this opening sequence of the script (which Eisenstein did not film), we can see a thesis-antithesis and the suggestion of its synthesis. The next sequence, a more powerful opening, is the famous scene of the Tsar's statue: shots of the statue, appearing omnipotent and permanent; shots of the angry masses of people who surround and rope the statue; then the stone Tsar begins to wobble and tilt; back and forth between the statue and the people the struggle goes on, until, with shot 31, the Tsar falls and breaks into pieces, into the synthesis, "FOR ALL, FOR ALL."

Immediately, a new thesis is established: "LONG LIVE THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT." Once again, the people must struggle with it until, at the end of Act I, it is resolved into the Menshevik synthesis: "LONG LIVE THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION." Act II opens with this synthesis immediately turned into Lenin's thesis: "SOCIALIST AND NOT BOURGEOIS/DOWN WITH THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT."

The second act, probably the most exciting and dynamic in the script and later in the film, has the Petrograd workers in mortal struggle with their enemies. Back and forth the fight continues--and out of this collision comes powerful drama--until in the final scene of the act, the Bolshevik agitators convince Kornilov's "Wild Division" to come over to their side.

The third act opens with the title: "THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION WAS PUT DOWN BUT THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION DID NOT GIVE UP THEIR ARMS." Then we read Lenin's famous dictum: "IT IS NECESSARY TO SEIZE POWER." (In the shooting script, Eisenstein uses these quotations and titles much more extensively than he does in the film; in fact, one of his triumphs in OCTOBER is the translation of abstract and verbal political argument into visual terms.) In the third act, the Bolsheviks contend directly with the Provisional Government and those whom they lump together with Kerensky: the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. The act ends with the Bolshevik Revolutionary Military Council drawing up plans for the insurrection and tracing them out on a map of Petrograd.

This synthesis, the Bolshevik plan for a *coup d'etat*, becomes the thesis for Act IV: move the red troops into position. This is also the point where the script loses much of its dynamic quality. Eisenstein presents the Bolsheviks as inexorable: "shot #249, One after the other, the [red] detachments come into the city; shot #250, One after the other, the orders fly from the small office [the Revolutionary Military Committee's headquarters] along the telephone lines; shot #251, One after the other, the regiments occupy the strategic positions of the city; shot #252, One after the other, the detachments occupy: shot #253, the railroad stations, shot #254, the electricity stations, shot #256, the water stations..." (*Octobre,* p. 12). Instead of contending and struggling with the anti-thesis, the thesis simply overwhelms it.

Acts IV and V become a paean to the Bolshevik seizure of power. What should be the most dramatic moments of OCTOBER become flat and inevitable. Eisenstein violates his own principles of dialectical montage. There is no collision, merely a walk-over. There are ideas for excellent scenes and sequences, but the drama of the seizure of power is not present. Instead, the director plans a pageant.

In the script for Act V, he scheduled only sixteen shots of the storming of the Winter Palace (16 out of a total of 479 indicates their brevity). Eisenstein, however, made movies on location as well as in the conference room and when he came to shoot these scenes, he took fuller advantage of the magnificent Winter Palace. He added whole new sequences, such as the fighting in the crypts and the lumpenproletariat raiding the wine cellars, and he turned the unpromising last act of the script into an acceptable conclusion to the film.

As his script predicts and his film shows, Eisenstein's triumphs in OCTOBER come from his method of dialectical montage and his failures spring from the same source. Because he prepares his viewer for a dialectical and dramatic struggle--and part of his dialectic is to move the viewer into this struggle--when he undercuts the tension in the final two acts, he loses his audience. He also fails to gain the full impact from his final synthesis, Lenin's statement "THE WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' REVOLUTION HAS SUCCEEDED/LONG LIVE THE WORLD SOCIALIST REVOLUTION."

The viewer responds: It was too easy--where was the struggle?

ANALYSIS OF *OCTOBER*

(The following attempts to show how Eisenstein's dialectic works--or fails to work--in the film. Because of limitations of space and readers' patience, I have concentrated on the important scenes and shots.)

ACT I

The Statue of Alexander III--the despotic Tsar's huge image dominates the screen. Thesis: the old order. The scene is at twilight, the end of an era. The symbols of the old order--throne, crowned head, sceptre, and imperial globe--dominate the picture and the director shoots from a low angle to make them appear even larger and more powerful. Behind the statue is the steeple of the Church of Christ the Savior--the tie between church and state.

Crowds of people run up public steps. Eisenstein, always translating political ideas into visual images, announces one of his dominant metaphors: those ascending steps are moving to power, those descending are losing power (he had used the same metaphor in STRIKE and POTEMKIN). The people, the antithesis, have come to oppose the Tsar's power.

For his contemporary Soviet audience, Eisenstein has immediately stated a crucial premise: he is creating his own version of revolutionary history, he is shunning strict verisimilitude for an impressionistic view of events. The statue of Alexander III was in Moscow--not St. Petersburg, where the February riots occurred--and the statue was not pulled down until 1921, four years after the revolution. As he says in his essay on dialectical montage, one of his aims was the "Liberation of the whole action from the definition of time and space. My first attempts at this were in OCTOBER" (*Film Form,* 58).

The people surround the statue and a peasant woman climbs onto its base to harangue the crowd. At first the woman seems tiny against the Tsar's image, she barely comes up to his ankle. A rope is thrown up to her, then three workers climb onto the crown and tie ropes about the head and neck, they are a tiny group of people against the massiveness of Tsarist Russia. Eisenstein's political message, and one of his main themes, is that although the people are ready for revolution, they need the leadership of the energetic and audacious few: the Bolsheviks.

Eisenstein cuts first to a crowd of soldiers who raise their rifle butts to the sky, then to a crowd of peasants holding sickles against the sky. All acts in history connect: the army and the peasant masses are ready to join the revolution. The first title announces "February."

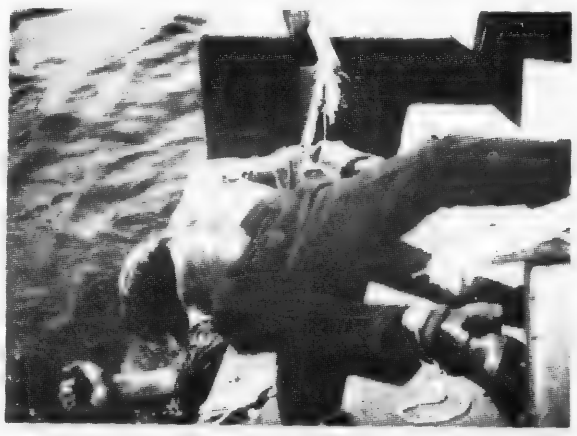
The ropes for the Tsar's statue are in place, their great number underlines the countless ties between the old order and the new--out of imperial Russia has come its revolutionary proletariat. The dismembering of the statue begins--in the same way, imperial Russia was dismembered by the war. The head shakes, the arms come off and the Romanoffs rock upon their throne. It is decayed and dismembered but still it does not topple (Russia from 1914 to February, 1917). Shots of the army and the peasants, then, finally, with a tremendous heave, the statue falls forward.

"For all, for all, for all" (Eisenstein plays with the title's connotation: this was the way announcements and telegrams began). A close-up shot shows two men, grossly bourgeois according to the best Eisensteinian "typage," congratulating each other. The director said that "In concept, from beginning to end, OCTOBER is pure 'typage'" (*Film Form*, 9). A shot of a church incense burner. "FOR ALL." The temporary synthesis of the February upheaval: the bourgeois take-over.

The opulence of the Church and the absurdity of the Metropolitan of Novgorod is juxtaposed to a poor peasant woman, praying: the people must learn that religion is fake and a tool of the state.

Tsarist Army officers burst into laughter; politicians sing "Huzzah!" (through the rhythmic montage we seem to hear them). But the soldiers want peace: bayonets stuck in the snow, fraternization of Russian and German troops (honest, open faces including the long, thin one of Eisenstein's cameraman, Edward Tissé, as a German soldier). "BROTHERS." One particularly intense soldier gives a political speech (probably he is a Bolshevik); the cut from his face to the crowd shows the dialectic between them. Soon all soldiers, Russian and German, applaud.

An allied embassy: a flunkey in full morning coat and tails walks onto an ornate, mosaic floor--its center, a Medusa head--and extends a sheet of paper. The diplomatic document appears to sprout snakes. The war must continue, the Provisional Government is the lackey of the Allies (the Bolsheviks called for immediate peace). Shots of the imperial eagle, church crosses, bayonets in the snow.



An explosion: the friendly soldiers panic and flee to their trenches. Montage of soldiers running--explosions--men falling--debris falling--montage of a huge machine pressing down, the meat-grinder of The Great War. All men are brothers and only kill each other when trapped by machines, literal and institutional ones.

Out of the unstable synthesis of the Provisional Government's war comes greater oppression of the workers and the army, and starvation. A tableau of a breadline at winter twilight. The scene, a change of pace and an effective counterpoint to the frantic battle sequence, conveys the static, endless waiting for bread that is not there (a situation Eisenstein must have remembered from his life in Petrograd in 1917).

"Everything is the same as before. Famine and war. But at the Finland Station, on the 3rd of April..." Night: lights play on the crowd, honest faces of workmen, soldiers and sailors. In the crowd a glimpse of Lenin's face (played by his look-alike, Nikandrov). He climbs up to a platform by stepping on a wheel. Close-up shot of his foot on the wheel (the Bolshevik wheel of history is about to roll). Lenin speaks: "Down with the Provisional Government." Eisenstein shoots up at Lenin to confirm his domination of

the scene and the historical moment; then he shoots down so that Lenin seems to fuse with his audience. Lenin's synthesis, which becomes the thesis for the next act, is "ALL power to the Soviets. Long Live the Socialist Revolution. Socialist and not Bourgeois."

As the first act shows, Eisenstein sought a dramatic view of revolutionary history. His controlling idea came from his understanding of Hegel and Marx: history as dialectical conflict. Although generally following the flow of events in early 1917, he moves beyond specific events and seaches for dialectical tension and drama. When showing the Army's desire for peace, he does not distinguish between regiments (a few were still Tsarist in sympathy, most supported the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, and a handful were Bolshevik) or even fronts (some were more anti-war than others). Instead, he tries to focus on the deeper feelings of the muzhik soldiers and the fact that although victims of the military machine, they were not quite ready for revolt. Eisenstein's premise is that the overview contains the dialectical truths of history.

In Act I, he telescopes five confused days of street-fighting in Petrograd in February, 1917, into one sharp sequence--the statue toppling--which he does not specifically locate in Petrograd. He recreates Lenin's arrival at the Finland Station but sees no reason to mention either the squabbles within the Bolshevik leadership or the ambiguous nature of Lenin's return (the Germans transported him from Switzerland in a sealed train). For Eisenstein, history is dialectical and its essence, rather than its surface, is crucial.

ACT II

The second act focuses on the July Days: a series of strikes and street-fighting incidents led by the Anarchists and the far left-wing Bolsheviks (against the will and strategy of the Bolshevik Central Committee). Why was Eisenstein fascinated by the July Days? Some critics suggest purely technical reasons: he was filming in high summer and these were the main summer events of the revolutionary year. A less superficial reason--and the film reveals it--is that for Eisenstein the July Days provided the greatest drama of 1917. The workers and soldiers struggle against a strong opponent and are temporarily set back. This is the drama of STRIKE and POTEMKIN and here again Eisenstein probably gravitated to a favorite theme.

The July Days sequence opens with crowds of people mounting the steps of public buildings (resonances of the opening of Act I). The seemingly spontaneous uprising demands that the Provisional Government resign. The people rise up, the bourgeois government must come down. Streetcars pass between a speaker and the camera (the moving engines of history).

Trotsky addresses a group of sailors; he is wearing a Red Army uniform, gold-rimmed glasses and a goatee; the sailors are identified as "Kronstadt Marines"--Trotsky's special followers. "The uprising is premature." The sailors discuss this among themselves and decide to sheathe their bayonets. The people start down the public steps. But the Provisional Government provokes an incident and fires on the crowd. Montage of machine-gun barrels--the dispersing crowd--the firing guns--the fleeing crowd--banners fall. Revolutionary banners are a key motif in this sequence: when raised high, they signify the people moving toward power; when fallen, the bourgeois counter-attacking.

The camera is perched above the intersection of Sadovaia and Nevsky Prospects and there are sharp newsreel-like shots of masses of people fleeing across public spaces. Then comes the famous montage of the machine-gunner intercut with his firing gun; in the montage fusion, the soldier becomes his machine, he is reified into a brutal, dehumanized object. The dialectic within this shot connects to the movement within the sequence--the machine-gunner versus the fleeing crowd--within the Act--the Provisional Government versus the people--and finally, within the film--oppression versus revolution.

The director relentlessly shoots down into the fleeing crowd to produce the sense of the distant and brutal bourgeois Government always aloof from the masses below. The people must obtain guns to bring Kerensky and Co. off their high perch.

A young worker, with a revolutionary banner under his arm, runs along the river quay (this area, near the Nevsky Prospect, was one of the wealthier sections of Petrograd). A fancy parasol fills the screen--through it we see a luxuriously dressed woman and her officer lover in a boat. They spot the worker with the flag. "A Bolshevik." The officer attacks the worker, the lady calls out to well-dressed passers-by--they join in beating the worker. The coquette sits in the boat, twirling her parasol and coyly holding her chin up to watch this spectator sport: the utter decadence of the Russian bourgeoisie, like the Romans watching the mauling of Christians. (By piling up his arresting images of the bourgeoisie, Eisenstein moves the viewer to his perception of middle class life. In this act particularly, the Provisional Government and Kerensky seem the occasion for his much wider and deeper attack on everything bourgeois.)

Some women attempt to destroy the Bolshevik flag. One tries to tear it with her teeth, another lifts her skirt to try to stomp its

PHOTO: Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, NYC

pole: the bourgeoisie are so reified, so turned into their objects of wealth, their possessions--visually, the women become their fancy hats--that they live in a world of fetishes and false symbols, and they think that by destroying the flag, they can obliterate the Bolsheviks. But the bourgeoisie is impotent. The women are unable to destroy the flag; they cannot destroy even the symbol of Bolshevik power, never mind the real thing. (Eisenstein's consistent satire and vengeance upon the bourgeoisie--he is the Daumier of the cinema with his brilliant eye for *épater*--probably derives from his own middle class origins. A proletarian director would not care enough to sustain such anger.)

A well-dressed old gentleman cheers on the women by clapping effetely with one gloved hand. A bourgeois woman's cruel laughter dissolves into a montage of machine-guns and wounded bodies. Then Konavalov, the Minister of Trade and Industry--his symbol is a very ornate telephone--orders the Neva draw-bridges, separating the bourgeois and working class sections, raised. He also confuses these symbols with actual power, and later he will discover what occurs when the telephone wires are cut.

The still understructure of the bridge fills the screen; slowly, inexorably, the machines move. Eisenstein, always fascinated with machinery (and during his earlier constructivist phase, optimistic about it), equates it here with inhuman destruction. At the exact center of the bridge lies the body of a young woman--her long hair is slowly stretched as the bridge opens. She is a symbol of the human tragedy of civil war. Shot by government troops, she is at the exact symbolic center of this divided country. While the Provisional Government raised the bridges in order to preserve class division, the Bolsheviks will lower all bridges.

A white carriage horse hangs from the opening bridge. A symbol of luxury and waste, its plunge into the Neva implies the abuse of nature and the end of a decadent era. The impassive stone head of a Pharaoh fills the screen: the Provisional Government does not care about the loss of human and animal life. ("Pharoah" was also a popular epithet for the Tsar's police.) As the sides of the bridge stand apart, we realize that the revolutionary synthesis was not possible in July.

But within the Provisional Government's power are the seeds of its own destruction. The bourgeois, on their bank, laugh and clap as the workers flee. An army officer throws a stack of captured *Pravda* (truth) tracts into the Neva. They bob about and some do not sink.

The streets of Petrograd: those soldiers who have fought with the workers trudge in file, guarded by their captors and jeered at by the bourgeois spectators. Treated like trained animals, they are forced to march in unison with the hoofs of their captors' horses. A cut to the face of a well-dressed elderly man: in the sentimental tradition this face would signal a kindly old man, but when we see the man mocking the soldiers, Eisenstein breaks through the surface and reveals class venality. This sequence, some of it shot through columns and ruins with the resonances of prisoners being led into Rome, repeats the analogy of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

A corridor in the Winter Palace: first the back, then the body of a man in a Provisional Government officer's uniform walking down the long corridor of ornate columns: Kerensky. As he moves away from the camera, he becomes smaller and dwarfed by his surroundings. In February, Kerensky loomed large but as the months went by, he shrank to his true insignificance. At the end of the hall is a large stone crucifix: Kerensky is moving closer to the establishment church and the old order. Visually tiny, slowly he begins to mount the huge staircase. He is the usurper coming to power and his slow, unsure pace contrasts with the people's earlier rush up the public stairways (and the Bolsheviks later charge up these same Winter Palace steps).

The sequence of titles is ironic. "Dictator." Kerensky's shiny boots fill the screen, all surface and polish. "Commander-in-Chief." Kerensky has power backwards, he is all symbol and title and no reality. He begins to trot up seemingly endless stairs--the comic sequence continues at length becuase he will never arrive at real power.

He passes a statue of the goddess Diana. She extends the laurel wreath of victory. Kerensky studies her--again mistaking stone symbols for real victor. "The hope of the homeland and the revolution: A.F. Kerensky" (a pun on Kerensky's surnames, Alexander Fiodorovich, and initials, the initials of the hated Tsarina, Alexandra Fiodorovna). "The lackeys of the Tsar" await Kerensky on the landing. Fat, bemedalled Rodzianko, former Lord Chamberlain to the Tsar, greets him.

Eisenstein shoots Kerensky from side angles to make him appear even less important, and for much of the sequence, a naval attache's white uniform dominates the picture. Kerensky chats politely with the liveried Palace servants. Rodzianko exclaims, "Ah, what a democrat!" (This is doubly ironic because Rodzianko was working to restore the monarchy and Kerensky, upon assuming the Prime Ministership, insisted upon moving into the Tsar's Winter Palace.) Kerensky moves down the line of servants, threatening to slip through the frame and out of every picture.

Kerensky's polished boots fill the screen. (Boots and feet are a central metaphor and we are to contrast these shiny ones with the battered boots of the captured soldiers, and later, the ragged, urgent feet of the Bolsheviks at their Smolny headquarters). We see either the parts of Kerensky's body--boots, gloves, back, etc.--in close-up or his whole body in miniature, we never view Kerensky as a whole, lifesized person.

A padlock on a cell door: Kerensky's synthesis becomes the Provisional Government's thesis of oppression. Two sailors, one the famous Bolshevik, Dybenko, in chains, on mattresses. "Traitors." "Bolsheviks." Shots of the ransacked Khesinskaia Palace--the Bolsheviks had liberated the palace of the Tsar's ballerina mistress for their original headquarters and after the July Days' uprising, government soldiers wrecked it.

Antithesis--a moonlit night in the country, the pastoral quiet of a lake and a hut in the woods: "Underground...Lenin in his cabin." A simple camp fire with a kettle over it: when the kettle begins to whistle, the Bolsheviks will move.

These sequences, with their sharp dialectical montages and transitions, produce the rhythm of drama and revolution. The chambers of "Alexandra Fiodorovna," the immense opulence of the palace apartment (all for Kerensky) contrast with the squalid, overcrowded prison cell and Lenin's spartan hut. Kerensky sits on a throne chair. Unlike Lenin, who always consumes his setting and the screen, Kerensky appears tiny.

Kerensky, at his oversized desk, signs the decree restoring "capital punishment at the front" (this decree allowed officers to shoot mutinous soldiers; it marked the Provisional Government's irrevocable commitment to the war machine).

Kerensky trudges up more stairs, even slower and less sure of himself although he holds his hand in his coat à la Napoleon. A cut to a statue of Napoleon in the same pose. (Eisenstein did not create this analogy: as soon as Kerensky came on the scene in 1917, the Bolsheviks were calling him a "two bit Bonaparte.") The statue of Napoleon dissolves into long lines of porcelain *grand levé* soldiers: Kerensky's army is a collection of china dolls. Then Kerensky sits contemplating a chess board; he fiddles with a four piece crystal decanter and he fits the pieces together. He slides open a hidden panel in the chess board and pulls out a small jewelled crown: Kerensky, the self-

proclaimed revolutionary, secretly hopes to restore a monarchy (it is not clear whether it is the Romanoffs or Kerensky himself. In 1917 wits were saying that Kerensky had come . . .'to be crowned' (Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor, 1932, Vol. II, 150). Kerensky places the crown on top of the crystal decanter, and in one of Eisenstein's greatest montages, a jet of steam from a factory stack erupts--the 'workers' revolution will not accept a monarchy. The montage flashes back and forth and the title proclaims: "The revolution is in danger."

Then Tsarist "General Kornilov attacks." The next sequence, cut from most American prints because of its anti-religious symbolism, is best described by Eisenstein himself:

> Kornilov's march on Petrograd was under the banner of In the Name of God and Country. Here we attempted to reveal the religious significance of this episode in a rationalistic way. A number of religious images, from a magnificent Baroque Christ to an Eskimo idol, were cut together. The conflict in this case was between the concept and the symbolization of God. While idea and image appear to accord completely in the first statue shown, the two elements move further from each other with each successive image. Maintaining the denotation of "God," the images increasingly disagree with our concept of God, inevitably leading to individual conclusions about the true nature of all deities. In this case, too, a chain of images attempted to achieve a purely intellectual resolution, resulting from a conflict between a preconception and a gradual discrediting of it in purposeful steps (*Film Form*, 62).

The titles read: "In the name of God and of the native land. In the name . . .OF GOD." Eisenstein plays upon the fact that Kornilov's troops were the Wild Division from Asiatic Russia, composed mostly of Moslems. He then intercuts a baroque Christ with a huge mask of Uzume, Goddess of Mirth, and a ferocious Chinese dragon, a roly-poly Buddha, the Hindu god-goddess Shiva, an Eskimo carving, and a South Sea island mask.

"IN THE NAME OF THE NATIVE LAND." To illustrate Kornilov's attempt to restore the monarchy, Eisenstein returns to the opening shots of the statue of Tsar Alexander III beneath the Church of Christ the Savior: the statue begins to reassemble and the dismantled throne pops back onto its pedestal. The Metropolitan of Novgorod blesses the scene.

"General Kornilov." The Russian General sits on a white horse. Cut to the famous statue of Napoleon on a white horse (the one in the Courvoisier Brandy ads). The man on the white horse will save the country; but Napoleon has additional meanings for Russians--a dictator and an invader of their country. Cut to Kerensky, arms crossed, in the Napoleonic pose; cut to the statue of Napoleon: "Two Bonapartes." Eisenstein attempts to animate the Bolshevik 1917 position; Trotsky called this chapter, "Kerensky and Kornilov (Elements of Bonapartism in the Russian Revolution)." Shots of the various Napoleons are intercut with the religious statues, ending with a juxtaposition of Christ and Kornilov.

A huge tank rears up, consuming the screen. Kerensky throws himself upon the bed of the Tsar. Suddenly the statue of Napoleon breaks into hundreds of pieces. The sequence constitutes both an historical flashback and a foreshadowing: within the Bonapartist invasion resides its own destruction--Napoleonic overreaching. Trains, tanks, and trucks move from all angles across the screen and seem to descend upon a spot in the center--Petrograd and the revolutionary proletariat. "And the government?" Kerensky cowers, then sleeps on his bed. "The government is impotent."

Factory smoke: then a line of Bolsheviks move toward us brandishing red flags. "We will not let the General pass." The revolutionary antithesis: long lines of workers, peasants, women, children, and soldiers. The people move across the screen from right to left--from apathy to revolution. The Bolsheviks free the political prisoners, some of whom we have seen earlier. Historical events are not isolated but connected and dynamic--the Government oppressors were foolish to think that padlocks could contain a revolution. But the Bolsheviks only free the political prisoners, for, as Eisenstein will underline in the Winter Palace cellars, common criminals are *lumpenproletariat* and cannot make a revolution.

Onto the screen comes the famous shot of the people dragging a cannon (one of Tissé's cameramen, Vladimir Nilsen, described in detail how this scene was shot: *The Cinema as Graphic Art*, tr. Stephen Garry, New York, 1959, 32.) The arsenal is opened and arms are distributed to the people: part of Eisenstein's on-going lesson in how to make a revolution. Each worker takes two rifles; although the Russian people were supposedly, tired of fighting, this scene shows that they were ready for the just struggle.

Cut to Smolny Institute, Bolshevik headquarters, the center of the defense. Kindly old working women giving out stacks of Bolshevik handbills show the crucial importance of the written word in making a revolution. Ironic titles--"Traitors" "Felons"--punctuate the Bolshevik defense of Petrograd.

Equal forces, the political Right and Left, are moving toward mortal struggle. A railroad yard at night: this is the most dramatic scene in OCTOBER. The Reaction: the train carrying Kornilov's Wild Division moves across the screen. From the left of the screen come the Bolshevik representatives: one, an honest, middle-aged man in civilian clothes, another, a soldier in Red Guard uniform. We are not certain what they are doing so close to the enemy. Out of this suspense and tension comes a telescoping of the confrontation between the Bolsheviks and the Wild Division troops.

Kornilov's soldiers move from right to left. Their Tartar faces fill the screen. Eisenstein choreographs the movements of the Wild Division from right to left; the Bolsheviks advance in the opposite direction, their profiles left to right.

Quick cut to Smolny: Bolshevik tracts and newspapers are carted out. In the railroad yard, the Bolshevik soldier on the left side of the screen argues with a Tartar leader on the right. Unlike the bourgeois ministers, they argue without theatrics or self-dramatization. For the Bolsheviks, ideas are more important than the individual speakers. The Bolshevik civilian takes out a handbill hidden in his boot: "Bolshevik tracts spoke a language understood by all." (the counterpoint to the scenes in Smolny). Slowly the Bolsheviks convince the Tartars: montage of Asian faces and growing awareness with the titles, "For bread," "For peace," "For land." A soldier wearing a Moslem head shawl nods in agreement. "For brotherhood," a Kronstadt sailor, moving from left to center, begins to make friends. Swords are sheathed.

The synthesis. Dancing Tartar feet, first the Bolsheviks watch and then join in the rhythmic clapping. A Bolshevik soldier joins the dance. The Tartars, through their national dances, are celebrating the revolution. The rhythmic montage quickens the dance pace. Eisenstein shoots at boot level and soon we cannot tell which boots are Bolshevik or Tartar. He then cuts with such speed that the boots begin to blend together into one continuous pair; then the dancers, Bolshevik and Tartar, become one. This visual synthesis seals the revolution--the army comes over to the Bolsheviks--and the scene ends with a cut of a broken statue of Buddha (the Tartars no longer follow false gods), the title, "General Kornilov is arrested," and the broken statue of Napoleon.

ACT III

Out of this synthesis immediately comes the thesis for Act III: "Proletarians, learn to use the gun." This is Lenin's post-Kornilov thesis: the revolution must take the offensive. (This is also part of Eisenstein's world propaganda message: in the 1920's, the Bolsheviks believed that world-wide revolution was possible, if not imminent.) Shots of the red guards being trained: young, old, workers and peasants, all have rifles on their shoulders and their worn boots march in step.

At this point in the film, Eisenstein departs radically from his original shooting script. He had planned a series of shots showing Lenin in hiding and the effect of Lenin's underground tracts, with the sequence building to Lenin's dictum: "It is necessary to seize power." Then, with the title, "For the Soviets," intercut between scenes, he planned shots of massive rallies of Kronstadt sailors, tank corps soldiers, and munitions factory workers voting "For the Soviets." In "80 Provinces...the flame of insurrection spreads." Then, key dramatic scenes in Petrograd when the Provisional Government orders the Petrograd garrison "to leave the city immediately." The Bolsheviks agitate in the garrison and the soldiers mutiny and announce, "The Petrograd garrison does not recognize the Provisional Government . . . . We will only obey orders from the revolutionary Military Committee of the Petrograd Soviet."

Almost none of this is in the film (possibly Eisenstein lacked the time to shoot it). The result is a short and truncated Act III which renders the film somewhat lopsided and less dramatic. The key to the revolution was the army coming over to the Soviets and although Eisenstein had suggested as much with the Wild Division-Bolshevik understanding, his elimination of the scenes of the mutiny of the Petrograd garrison places too great a dramatic emphasis upon the earlier dance sequence. In the film, the climax occurs too soon and undercuts the drama of the final acts. In dialectical terms, the film becomes a struggle between the old, decayed order--and Eisenstein lumps the monarchy and bourgeoisie together here--and the people, led by the Bolsheviks. The synthesis occurs when Kornilov's Army comes over to the people. The final three acts, therefore, instead of presenting the on-going dialectic of history, merely illustrate the synthesis of Act II.

Eisenstein violates his own "Dialectical Approach to Film Form." Since, as his script indicates, he believed that winning over the army was the key to the revolution and that the revolution was decided before the storming of the Winter Palace (purely a symbolic event), he needed to find and depict the dialectic of these events. Instead, he tries to infuse other events, especially the siege of the Winter Palace, with tension and drama. The result is contradiction and confusion.

What we see of Act III is perfunctory and unsatisfactory. The one scene that remains from the original script occurs when a speaker addresses a huge crowd of uniformed red guards. The camera points down at them and suddenly, in unison, they look up and lift their rifles, bayonets fixed, skyward (this is juxtaposed to the opening scenes of bayonets in snow and unwillingness to fight for the old order). Next, titles tell us: "On October 10th, the Bolshevik Central Committee decided upon armed insurrection. The Second Soviet Congress was scheduled for October 25th. At this Congress, the question of seizing power will be discussed. The 24th is too soon (for insurrection)." Lenin, arguing across a table, consumes the screen, "The 25th (will be the date for insurrection)." Lenin's colleagues applaud.

cineaste

WINTER 1976-77 ISSUE

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The third act ends with the Bolsheviks planning the insurrection. A map of Petrograd fills the screen and a hand with a crayon marks certain key points and circles the Winter Palace and the Admiralty Building. The map is a clever device for conveying in visual, silent language the plan of action: unfortunately, the effect depends upon the viewer's familiarity with Petrograd--a Russian audience would follow the crosses and circles as easily as Americans would understand a marked map of Washington, D.C.

With his revised Act III and his emphasis upon the date and plan of insurrection, Eisenstein begins to construct a new dramatic movement--the seizure of power. Unfortunately, the premises for drama are not present and when we see what opposes the Bolsheviks--windbags and cowards and women and children--we smile rather than tense. In the first two acts, we experienced the fight for power: a thesis-protagonist, the people, in mortal and equal struggle with their antithesis-antagonist, the old order. But with Act III, the tension evaporates. As a result, in the final acts, the director will use every visual trick of humor, showmanship, and sensation in his magician's storehouse merely to keep his viewers' interest.

ACT IV

"During the night of the 24th, they prepared . . ." the insurrection. The Cruiser Aurora rests at anchor in the winterdawn: the fortuitously named ship symbolizes the dawn of a new era. Aurora marines land and government soldiers scuttle away without firing a shot, their haste is almost comic.

The draw-bridges close: now the machines are controlled by the revolution and work for, not against, the people. A bridge falls into place and the boots of ordinary citizens run across it toward the city center, toward the symbolic center of power.

In the Ministers' Council Chamber, Konovalov slams down his ornate telephone: his symbol of power no longer works. Cut to a red guard, rifle over shoulder, and the Aurora in the background: the objects of real power. The dialectic here is between the red guards, rifles and action, versus Konovalov's frustration with his ornate telephone, speech and inaction. The film cuts back and forth but each time the red guards advance.

Kerensky, nervous, telephones from the Tsar's office to the Cossack stable. (The Cossacks, traditionally, were the most conservative and dependable of government troops.) In the stable, one lone Cossack on duty, answers. Kerensky announces, "This is the Minister of War." The Minister of War is speaking very close to the telephone's mouthpiece and cowering alongside his desk. "Where are the Cossacks?" The stable keeper looks over the horses in their stalls--"We are in the midst of saddling the horses"--when he hangs up he makes a contemptuous gesture of thumb to lips. (This title seems based on the famous message of the Cossack assembly to Kerensky's plea for aid: "he was told that the regiments would soon . . . 'begin to saddle their horses.'" (Trotsky, Vol. III, p. 243.) A montage of Kerensky slamming down his phone, the Cossack shrugging his shoulders, Kerensky's jewel-encrusted telephone, and a long line of horses' rear-ends: Kerensky is a horse's ass. In dialectical and dramatic terms, the horse business, although amusing, flattens out the action and renders Kerensky an unworthy opponent, a fool outwitted by a stable keeper.

The red guards take, in an orderly and almost peaceful way, various key points in Petrograd. Cut to the Winter Palace courtyard, a huge, plush, open touring car with the American Embassy's pennant on it stands ready (the American ambassador had loaned Kerensky the car). Cut to the red guards advancing; they encounter no Government resistance. "And at the head of the betrayed armies . . ." Kerensky grabs his hat, the chauffeur waits. Kerensky enters the car; Eisenstein first shoots him from overhead--Kerensky appears as a tiny figure standing in a huge open car, making operatic gestures. Then at ground level perspective: Kerensky's upraised arm in a Napoleonic gesture and, behind him, a pillar with the Tsarist eagle and a cross on top--the on-going and relentless connection of Kerensky and the old order.

Part of the grotesquerie of Kerensky's farewell speech is that he delivers it as if addressing a huge crowd. In fact, his audience consists of a handful of sinister-looking officials and frightened flunkies. When the car starts with a jerk, Kerensky falls down into his seat and is whisked off the stage of history. It all happens quickly and comically as in the old stage routine in which the comedian is jerked into the wings.

The car roars off and the Winter Palace gates close behind it. Dominating the upper center of the picture, on top of the gates, is a fierce bronze Romanoff double eagle, wings spread, with vicious heads and beaks. When the gates shut, the imperial bird of prey moves uneasily (like Yeats' falcon in "The Second Coming"--a poem partly prompted by these events). The car speeds through the city. With the camera on the hood and the scenery flying by, Kerensky's flight is accentuated and the comic fluttering of the stiff little American flag contrasts with the rich waving of the Bolshevik banners in other scenes.

Eisenstein's unyielding portrayal of Kerensky's farewell can be seen in a number of ways: as a reasonably accurate representation of the event (although historians argue about whether Kerensky was cowardly or clever in leaving the city under a diplomatic flag); as a propaganda portrait,

PHOTO: Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, NYC

(for Soviet consumption as a reminder of the past, for export as an example of the present, for both to show that bourgeois leaders and governments are cowardly, corrupt, and ineffectual); or as Eisenstein's personal comment on his own bourgeois father's flight from revolutionary Russia. The personal element probably explains the relentlessness of the attack.

The scene moves to the Winter Palace. Student cadets, with well-fed, chubby faces, arrive to defend it--they are like sleek piglets. The Women's Battalion of Death marches in. They go up a short flight of stairs; their short climb signals how brief their power over the Winter Palace will be. A Provisional Government official, Stankevich, hails the women as he stands beneath the massive, beautiful head of a statue of Adonis: weasel-faced Stankevich is no Adonis, his greeting the Women's Battalion of Death is a parody of authentic sexual greeting and love, and the Provisional Government is self-absorbed and narcissistic to think itself beautiful like Adonis. As with all false gods--a reference to the breaking idols sequence--it will soon be shattered.

The women bed down in Nicholas II's private billiard hall. Some, shirts removed, admire themselves and strike Adonis-like poses. One woman is trying to make, out of a magnificent piece of silk and lacework, some stockings (the popular name for these were "Russians"). The camera lingers upon ample bosoms but it renders them more grotesque than sexually attractive: the Women's Battalion of Death, like the effeminate cadets, have been sexually perverted by Tsarism. This scene is amusing within itself and connects to Eisenstein's portrait of the decadent old order, but rather than intensify the struggle between the Provisional Government and the Bolsheviks, the grotesquerie diffuses potential conflict.

Cut to Kerensky's car on the outskirts of Petrograd: the camera is on the hood, the aide-de-camp in the front seat consumes most of the picture, the little man in the rear, even more hunched up in his coat than before, occupies almost no space on the screen. This sequence again violates Eisenstein's rule of dialectical montage: "art is always conflict." Here, the dialectical movement is away from conflict. Instead of Kerensky, the embodiment of the Provisional Government, moving toward a final collision with the Bolsheviks and the proletariat, he is fleeing. When, immediately after, titles announce, "At the call of the Revolutionary Military Committee, the people were assembling at Smolny," we doubt that a real fight will be necessary. The revolution has been won, only a few symbolic events, like the storming of the Winter Palace, need to take place.

Cut to the Bolsheviks' victory in the Second Soviet Congress (called by the Provisional Government and scheduled for October 25th--thus Lenin's desire for a successful coup on the eve of its convocation in order to have it legally ratify his new government). Again the dialectical structure is undercut by the lack of real collision: at the Second Congress, a struggle occurred between the Bolsheviks and their main opponents on the left, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, but Eisenstein so stacks his portrayal in favor of the Bolsheviks that once again, (as he himself later admitted) he undercuts his drama *Film Form*, 38 and 245).

The final events of OCTOBER become more a pageant than a dialectical struggle. First, nighttime activity at the Smolny Institute, the Bolshevik headquarters (this follows John Reed's eyewitness account): Bolshevik delegates rush upstairs to get instructions; red guards rush out to go to the Winter Palace and up those stairs. The activity is fused with Eisenstein's humor: a sign on a door announces "Guardian." Since the Smolny Institute had been a boarding school for wealthy girls, the Bolsheviks, it is implied, are watching over haut-bourgeois virginity.

Groups of delegates come and go, among one group Trotsky appears. In the entrance corridor stands a huge sword--the Bolsheviks are about to seize power. Outside, trucks filled with red guards and armored cars roar off, as the camera focuses on these moving wheels of history. The massiveness of the red guard buildup, its size and organization, which does not balance with what we have seen of the Provisional Government defenders, convinces the viewer of its inexorability.

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At the Second Soviet Congress delegates present their credentials: workers and peasants are Bolsheviks; bourgeois citizens and regular army officers are Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. In one of the corridors outside the meeting hall a man in an overcoat sits on a bench, cap pulled low and face wrapped as if suffering from a toothache. Two rat-faced bourgeois look at him carefully. A superimposed image reveals Lenin, whose bald head appears through the cap and bandage. Lenin turns to his companion, either Trotsky or Eino Rakhia, and says, "They have recognized me, the bastards!" Lenin takes out his watch and taps his foot--it's only a matter of time now--his heavy working man's boots, in marked contrast with Kerensky's polished shoes, signal his impatience.

The Winter Palace: all seems quiet. In the Council of Minister's chambers, around an ornate table, sit the ministers of the Provisional Government--later, Antonov-Ovseenko will leap upon this same table when he seizes power on behalf of the Revolutionary Military Committee. A montage with the title, "The Head," an empty chair at the head of the table, the final shots of Kerensky leaving the city. The ministers "direct an appeal to the people." Cut to Lenin beating out his foot signal. This dialectic will soon resolve in a Bolshevik majority at the Congress and in the country.

A hand ringing a bell fills the screen: it is both tolling the demise of the Provisional Government and ringing for the Bolshevik triumph. A rat-faced Menshevik, in Provisional Government officer's uniform--the one who had recognized Lenin--speaks first. Historically, this speaker was the famous Menshevik leader, Dan. Eisenstein sharpens his features in the service of typage (Reed described him as "a mild-faced, baldish figure in a shapeless military surgeon's uniform." (*Ten Days That Shook the World,* New York, 1960, 132). As Dan speaks the secretaries sit at their table but they do not take down the Menshevik's words. Their inattention contrasts with the end of OCTOBER when Lenin speaks and they fall upon their dictation. Dan claims that "The Provisional Government alone represents the popular power."

Cut to the red guards in the corridors outside; to a single soldier in front of the Ministers' Council chamber; finally, Smolny, huge in the night sky. The title: "The question of power was envisioned otherwise by the Military Revolutionary Committee." Then the office of the committee: Antonov-Ovseenko, Podvoisky, and Chudnovsky discuss their plans. A map of Petrograd fills the screen. The Committee members trace out their plan on the map, cutting through the verbal questions with decisive action (Eisenstein here suggests the superiority of visual imagination to word games). As the crayon marks each point in the plan, the film cuts to the action: marines land from the Aurora, red guards take their battle stations around the Winter Palace, and red sailors move beneath a huge statue of Neptune on a throne (the Bolsheviks will control the seas). The crayon surrounds the Winter Palace: shots of that dark and ominous building.

Cutting from the map to the action gives the film an organic quality rare in silent movies. All too often silent titles are imposed and annoying; but here Eisenstein solves the problem with a more integrated technique. Statues, stairs, boots, and other on-going visual metaphors form part of his silent film language. They are more effective and cinematic than titles or voice-over narration.

Act IV ends with the temporary synthesis of the Bolsheviks in readiness for the new thesis, the final seizure of power. But the Military Revolutionary Committee and the red guards have so weighted the scales for the Bolsheviks--the cross-cutting from the map to the action is less dialectical than complementary--that the viewer cannot take the opposition, the Provisional Government, seriously.

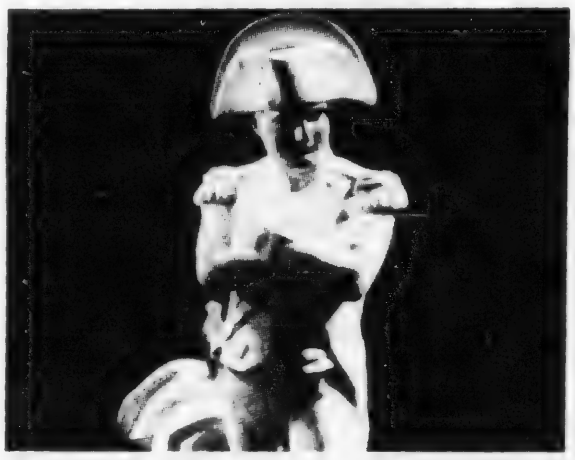
ACT V

The final act opens at the Second Soviet Congress, a Menshevik delegate (historically, Martov) challenges the impending Bolshevik seizure of power. The soldier delegates jeer and one shouts, "Down with the valets of the bourgeoisie." Then the presidium running the Congress, mainly Mensheviks and Sovial Revolutionaries, is voted down and leaves the dais. A Bolshevik banner unfurls.

Cut to Smolny Institute: frantic activity as delegates, red guards, and messengers come and go, tattered boots moving back and forth--the Bolsheviks do not use the telephone, they send their messages in human hands, they walk in and out of rooms.

Cut to Konovalov, who is still trying to make his telephone work. Meanwhile, outside the Winter Palace, Antonov-Ovseenko, floppy artist's hat pulled over his forehead, composes a surrender ultimatum. Unlike the ponderous and hollow formality of the Provisional Government Ministers writing their "appeal to the people" he writes on a crumpled piece of paper. Two young, fresh-faced red guards carry the message into the Winter Palace. They enter the huge vaulted corridor where we first saw Kerensky and his aides; because Eisenstein shoots from floor level up, the Bolshevik emmisaries are never dwarfed by these vast surroundings. They belong here, they take the full measure of power. Waving their white parley flag, they approach a barricade. Eisenstein achieves tension in this scene by cutting back and forth between the two sides and raising the question: are the Provisional Government defenders treacherous or stupid enough to fire on these two isolated red guards?

A Women's Battalion of Death officer, a particularly large, nasty faced one, emphasized by Eisenstein's low-angled shot, halts the two red guards. They look at her and one asks, "Little father?" (A polite, friendly Russian greeting). "Little mother?" the other red guard asks. "Countryman!" (from the same region). Her hauteur is foolish and inappropriate, for she will soon be brought down from this false height. The grotesque humor undercuts much of the tension: the two red guards,



still vulnerable, sit in the courtyard awaiting a reply but we no longer believe that anything terrible will happen to them.

The cruiser Aurora, guns ready. "ALL WAIT." A montage of positions in the city, the two sides are ready: the Council of Ministers' chamber--all asleep except one who stares out the window--a bivuoac of red guards, not asleep but waiting attentively--the Ministers' chambers, all sleep now--the Aurora, ready.

A close-up of Rodin's "Printemps": two nude lovers embracing passionately. A Women's Battalion soldier looks wistfully at the statue. As she studies the embracing lovers she brings her hand to her forehead as if suddenly realizing what she has missed in life. Eisenstein cuts from her to the statue, from the lovely naked limbs of Rodin's lovers to her masculine boots and leggings.

Almost midnight, the time of attack. Some red guards have slipped into the Winter Palace through the cellars from the Hermitage next door. They run up a flight of stairs, discarding all caution because they are so close to power. One group comes upon a sumptuous banquet being prepared for the cabinet ministers: the bourgeoisie will be decadent to the end.

Provisional Government officers have trouble rallying their troops. The initial fighting in the Winter Palace is less an ebb and flow of battle than a red tide. A Provisional Government minister exhorts some cadets: "We will not abandon our native land to those German spies, the Bolsheviks" (a standard accusation because Lenin had been transported from Switzerland by the Germans). The words are hollow, late and mendacious; even the cadets listen in silence, without enthusiasm. In the courtyard, the Cossacks, after hearing a Bolshevik speaker, cover their cannons, put down their rifles, and leave.

Back to the Second Congress: the Mensheviks claim that "The Army is not with "the Bolsheviks." The door of the hall bursts open, a soldier announces, "The 12th Army is with the Bolsheviks." Cut to a forest of soldiers raising their rifles--bayonets attached--in agreement; at the Second Congress, delegates stand and cheer. Cut to the Winter Palace--a Minister exhorts the increasingly passive cadets. Back to the Congress where a man announces, "The motorcycle battalion is for the Soviets": a montage of motorcycle wheels and entering delegates, Cossack artillery wheels leaving the Winter Palace; a secondary montage between the Soviet Congress working efficiently and the Provisional Government Ministers asleep in the Winter Palace. Gun fire in the distance--a crystal chandelier shakes: the Provisional Government is now as fragile as glass. At the Winter Palace, everything is ready for attack. At the Congress, a Menshevik speaker proclaims, "The Bolsheviks violate the process of history." For Eisenstein, images are real, words lie. This Menshevik speaker's symbol is a strumming balalaika.

The Bolshevik delegates stomp their feet, their impatience for power is increasing. A bourgeois woman with spectacles, obviously a Menshevik, disapproves of their rudeness. Cut to artillery flashes in the night. The Bolsheviks proclaim the new synthesis: "The time for words is over."

In the Palace courtyard, the two Bolshevik emmissaries get up and leave. With a montage of the Bolshevik speaker receiving wild applause (all words were not over!) and machine-guns loading and beginning to fire, the titles flash the Bolshevik slogans, "For peace," "For bread," "For land," and then, "The signal." The Aurora opens fire, bombs burst above the Winter Palace, the Ministers' table shakes.

At this point in OCTOBER, a bizzare but important incident occurs. Probably taking his scene from Reed, Eisenstein skewers the bourgeoisie one last time (see Reed, 124.). A delegation of bourgeois "notables," led by Schreider, Mayor of Petrograd, starts across the bridge between the Hermitage and the Winter Palace. The "notables" appear tiny as they approach; then the black legs and back of a Kronstadt sailor fill the screen. The next shot is from behind the crowd looking up at the massive sailor. The crowd halts; only one red sailor has stopped a whole flock of bourgeoisie. A little old lady tries to scold the sailor, the mayor shows his medal of office (another false bourgeois symbol of power), and a man with a huge beard (historically, Avksentiev, President of the Peasants' Soviet) tries to bluff his way through. The Bolshevik will not be moved: he does not argue, he knows his mind and his orders.

Once again, we see the reification of the middle class, their false symbols of power, and their failure to grasp the changing political reality. And the message--especially for export--is that if the proletariat, who form the navies, armies, and police in all countries, act in their own interests, instead of serving those of the bourgeoisie, they could easily run the state. The mayor's delegation wants the sailor to follow their orders, but the Bolshevik, having come to an awareness of his class interests, refuses to move. Because the bourgeoisie lack real power, armed might in the form of a single, determined, and armed Bolshevik can stop them.

The crowd becomes angry, the sailor raises his hand--still open, no need of a fist--higher. Bourgeois faces become distorted in impotent rage. The camera pauses in close-up on the square face and square glasses of an older woman--Julia Eisenstein, the director's mother. She, however, looks more pained than angered by this adamant Bolshevik!

The bourgeois characters are all relatively old, in contrast to the young, handsome sailor. Finally, the "notables" leave; seen from above and behind the sailor, the bourgeoisie appear small and cowering.

The scene works because it contains dialectical conflict in the form of a struggle between a bourgeois crowd and one Bolshevik (the balance here being part of the imbalance of the final three acts). For scenes where more than one Bolshevik appears--when an army of red guards attacks--we know exactly what will happen.

Artillery fires, red guards rush toward the Palace, a machine-gunner, whom we have seen in the July Days' massacre, fires--a few bodies fall but now the gunner shows no delight. A Kronstadt sailor climbs the locked main gates: his boot steps on the plaque of the Tsarist crown--down with the old order. The imperial eagle wobbles and the sailor opens the gates to the revolution. Red guards flow in, and the Woman's Battalion, looking particularly bedraggled, surrenders immediately. (Eisenstein shows his streak of misogyny here.) As a grenade explodes, the

red guards burst into the long entrance corridor of the Winter Palace. The camera focuses on the cross at the end of the hallway. Slowly the aperture closes until only the cross is visible in the diminishing circle of the screen, then it too dissolves--the end of the old order.

The red tide swallows the few cadets still fighting. Up the stairs, where Kerensky once reluctantly walked, rush the red guards. The Tsarina's bedroom becomes the final battle station for four cadets who hide behind the Tsarina's skirts--the revolution, however, allows no hiding places. Red guards and marines quickly overwhelm them, then one marine pauses to examine the strange, opulent world of the Tsarina's bed chamber. Amazed at the silk underwear and rich clothes, he then discovers some imperial crested chamberpots and a finely upholstered chair: it is the real throne and when he lifts the seat to examine the toilet beneath, he laughs. The joke is both a bizarre curiosity and a means to demystify the Tsar and Tsarina--they too go to the bathroom, even if royally.

Other red guards in the Tsarina's room are first stupified and then angered by this opulent world. They bayonet the thick mattresses (we remember the straw mats for the Bolsheviks in prison) and they create a great storm of stuffing and feathers. The storm of history is blowing away the Romanoffs and their way of life.

On a small altar in a corner of the Tsarina's room sits a wooden sculpture of Christ, a portrait of the Tsar (signed "Nicky"), other pictures of Jesus and Mary, and one of a woman lifting her petticoats, exposing herself, cut to a shot of the Tsarina's bidet. The montage connects the religiosity of the Tsariana (and the old order) with the rumored sexual liaison between her and the monk Rasputin.

A sailor opens a trunk and finds hundreds of mint-new St. George medals. He demands, "Is this what we fought for?" Suddenly perceiving the hollowness of the symbols of the old order, her overturns the trunk. The medals cascade out like so many worthless coins. Eisenstein wants his audience to come to this same critical awareness about the old order, the church, and the war. Only Bolshevik symbols, like the seizure of the Winter Palace, have meaning now. They represent and connect to current reality, i.e., political power.

Cut to the Second Soviet Congress: Antonov-Ovseenko appears wearing a dark, floppy, felt hat, rimless glasses, and a small beard--in his *artiste's* costume he very much resembles the famous photograph of James Joyce in similar dress. Perhaps Eisenstein is making a subtle homage to Joyce, whom he greatly admired.

Cut to the wine cellars: the *lumpenproletariat* enter and begin looting the shelves. Their portrayal is consistent with Eisenstein's ealier portrayal of this class. For as early as STRIKE, with its hostile picture of the *lunpenproletariat*, Eisenstein had illustrated the Marxist position that a revolution cannot be made by thieves and street people. Upstairs, in searching some captured cadets--mercenaries rather than real soldiers--

PHOTO: Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, NYC

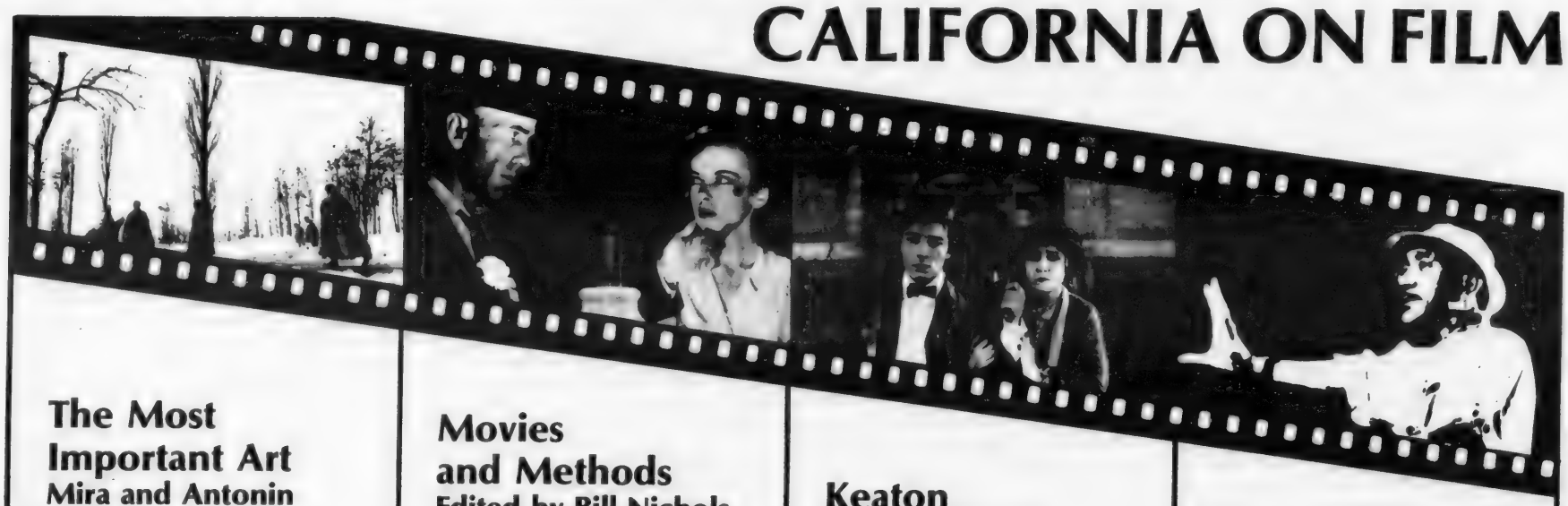
the red guards discover hidden loot, including a fancy jewelled letter opener, decorated with the Tsar's portrait. From under the cap of another cadet spills a stream of stolen silverware. The red guards keep a scrupulous account in a large ledger book of all property in the Winter Palace: it is now the property of the people and not to be pillaged.

Back in the wine cellars, the *lumpenproletariat* loot the shelves. Two Kronstadt sailors appear, chase the thieves out, and take axes to the bottles. An orgy of breaking glass and running liquor: the red guards, the ideal heroes of the revolution, are too sturdy and honest to be tempted by thievery or drink; therefore they destroy the wine cellars of the decadent old order. In the 1917, 1927, and even in the present day Russian context, this scene is part of an on-going Soviet campaign against alcoholism.

Cut to the Tsar's throne room where a young boy, dressed in a kind of junior Cossack outfit, twirls his cap in joy and jumps onto the throne. This young ragamuffin soldier first appeared peering through a barricade--his face framed by a machine gun--when the two Bolshevik emissaries presented the ultimatum; later, when the red guard climbed up to open the gates, he was in the crowd below, cheering him on; then, in the scramble over the barricades, he was with the second save of red guards; and finally, he appears in the throne room. Young, short and chubby, he stands out unmistakably in all of these scenes. Who is he? Is he Eisenstein's attempt to focus on a face in the crowd and to trace a single story? Why is he here?

Because there is no other single participant whom Eisenstein follows through the storming of the Winter Palace, and because it is uncharacteristic of Eisenstein, at least in OCTOBER, to focus on such a non-historical character, the young boy is possibly a kind of subtle, self-portrait of the director. The young boy, like Eisenstein at the time, begins on the bourgeois side but then, joyously, embraces the revolution. The young boy could be a projection of what Eisenstein might have done if he had been at the Winter Palace--instead of in his family home in Petrograd--on that famous night.

Two famous photographs taken during the filming of OCTOBER and reproduced in Marie Seton's biography offer further evidence. One shows "Eisenstein lolling in the Tsar's throne in the Winter Palace at the commencement of OCTOBER, 1972" (Seton's caption) and the other is the frame from the film where, sitting on the throne, "A small boy welcomes the Revolution in the closing scenes of OCTOBER (Seton's caption, *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography*, New York, 1951, 92). The poses are so close, the boy so resembles the short, chubby Eisenstein, and the entire film is so much an



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expression of Eisenstein's revolutionary joy that we can conclude that the young boy who embraces the revolution in the film is probably a self-portrait. Eisenstein, like some of his favorite Renaissance painters, has put himself in a corner of his own canvas.

The boy jumps onto the throne. From a very low angle, we see the boy's feet swinging in the air. This blasphemous treatment of the sacred throne of the Romanoffs underlines the meaning of the revolution: everything is changed, everyone is liberated. There is nothing mystical or sacred about the throne. Why shouldn't a young boy enjoy it? It is now state property and belongs to everyone--even the ordinary citizens of the old order can sit in it with impunity, for the people have become the monarchs of the new order.

Cut to Antonov, followed by the red guards, in a central rotunda of the Winter Palace. Opposite him are some cadets: one detachment of cadets separates the Bolsheviks from power. The red guards flood the hall and swallow the cadets.

The Council of Ministers: agitated, the ministers discuss their fate. Antonov leads the rush down the hallway. On the Ministers' table sits a line of empty glasses: the empty well of the Provisional Government. Konovalov says, "Let us meet them (the Bolsheviks) with dignity." Here we have bourgeois morality: a silly and false sense of dignity means nothing in the face of the people's revolution--and Antonov will jump on the table to prove the point.

Montage of an axe breaking a wine cask and the Ministers' door being broken in--Antonov rushes through and announces, "You are all under arrest." Meekly the Ministers raise their hands. The red guards treat the "prisoners" kindly, in marked contrast to the Provisional Government's vindictive treatment of them. Konovalov--trapped to the end by false bourgeois symbols--tries to straighten his tie before being led out.

Antonov at the Ministers' table: with emphatic sweeps of his arm, he knocks away various ministerial paraphenalia in order to clear a space to write (just as the Bolsheviks were sweeping away the old order and clearing a space for themselves in Russian and world politics). Assisting him is the old Bolshevik agitator whom we first saw persuading Kornilov's troops not to fight. Antonov writes: "In the name of the Military Revolutionary Committee, I declare the Provisional Government OVERTHROWN."

A montage of clocks read: 2:10 a.m. Clocks all over the world spin to the moment when the Bolsheviks seize power.

Cut to the young boy asleep on the throne: the red guards and the people have completed their night's work and the director has finished his project.

The Soviet Congress: wild applause, Lenin takes the podium, and secretaries fall to dictation. Lenin announces: "THE WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' REVOLUTION HAS SUCCEEDED." The film ends with Lenin's synthesis: The old thesis has been overthrown by the Bolshevik opposition--the result is a new "WORKERS' AND PEASANTS'" state.

CONCLUSION

OCTOBER is a revolutionary film. It is a celebration and call to revolution. It is the culmination both of the most fertile decade in Soviet politics and art, and of the most productive period in the career of a great Marxist director. Yet OCTOBER is flawed.

No single observer or participant understood the Russian Revolution better than Leon Trotsky. In a passage from his *History*, he sums up Eisenstein's dilemma in OCTOBER:

> The final act of the revolution seems, after all this, too brief, too dry, too business-like--somehow out of correspondence with the historic scope of the events. The reader experiences a kind of disappointment. He is like a mountain climber, who, thinking the main difficulties are still ahead, suddenly discovers that he is already on the summit or almost there. Where is the insurrection? There is no picture of the insurrection. The events do not form themselves into a picture. A series of small operations, calculated and prepared in advance, remain separated one from another both in space and time. A unity of thought and aim unites them, but they do not fuse in the struggle itself. There is no action of great masses. There are no dramatic encounters with the troops. There is nothing of all that which imaginations brought up upon the facts of history associate with the idea of insurrection. (Trotsky, III, 232.)

Because Eisenstein perceived the dialectical truth of the revolution, he could not betray his perception for false drama, and yet he wanted to portray the revolution visually. His cinematic imagination could not find the visual equivalents for the hundreds of thousands of words Trotsky needed for his literary masterpiece on the same subject.

In explaining the revolution, however, in attempting to animate dialectical materialism, Eisenstein extended the boundaries of the cinema. And, inspite of his failure to sustain the dialectical form of the first two acts, he has greatly broadened our political and visual experience. ■

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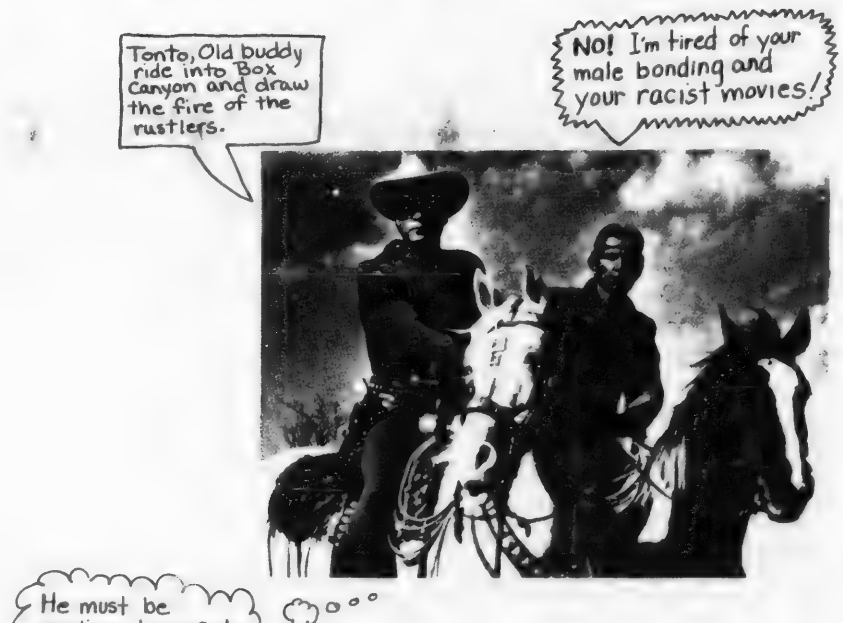
Tonto, Old buddy ride into Box Canyon and draw the fire of the rustlers.
NO! I'm tired of your male bonding and your racist movies!
He must be reading JumpCut.

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FILM AND PHOTO LEAGUE

Radical Cinema in the 30's

Unemployment Demonstration
PHOTO: Leo Seltzer

I. Introduction

--Russell Campbell

The Workers Film and Photo League in the United States (known as the Film and Photo League after 1933) was part of an extensive cultural movement sponsored by the Communist International and its affiliated national parties in the inter-war period. Specifically, it was a section of the Comintern-controlled Internationale Arbeiterhilfe or Workers International Relief (WIR), founded at Lenin's instigation in Berlin in 1921.

The WIR's initial function was famine relief in the Soviet Union. After the crisis had passed, the organization--with branches established in most countries of the world--became an international support force for strikers and their families: in the US, for example, it provided food, clothing and shelter during the Communist-led textile and cotton workers' strikes at Passaic, New Bedford and Gastonia in 1926-29, and the miners' strikes of 1931-32.

But the WIR's activities extended also into the mass media and many cultural fields. In Germany, under the leadership of the remarkable Communist entrepreneur and propagandist Willi Muenzenberg, the WIR built up a flourishing publishing empire encompassing daily and weekly newspapers, illustrated periodicals, and books, all with a leftwing perspective. Elsewhere, with the exception of the Soviet Union, the WIR concentrated on ventures requiring little or no capitalization. Thus in the United States the WIR organized, during the early Thirties, revolutionary drama groups (the Workers Laboratory Theatre), dance groups (the Red Dancers), symphony and mandolin orchestras, bands, choirs, art workshops, etc.

Muenzenberg was especially interested in film. In a 1925 article he decried the fact that "in the main the labor organizations and even Communist Parties and groups have left this most effective means of propaganda and agitation in the hands of their enemy," and called for "the conquest of this supremely important propaganda weapon, until now the monopoly of the ruling class." "We must wrest it from them," he concluded, "and turn it against them."[1]

The WIR's first motion picture activity was in Russia, where in 1922 it began distributing German films. In 1924 it formed the production company Mezhrabpom-Russ (later Mezhrabpomfilm, "Mezhrabpom" being the abbreviation for the Russian name of the WIR), which was to be responsible for many of the more significant Soviet features of the period, including Pudovkin's MOTHER, END OF ST. PETERSBURG, STORM OVER ASIA and DESERTER, Vertov's THREE SONGS ABOUT LENIN, and the first Soviet sound film, Ekk's ROAD TO LIFE. Muenzenberg was to claim credit for the WIR for the international perspective of many of Mezhrabpom's productions, such as STORM OVER ASIA, which he termed "the first film to thrust deeply into the chaos of imperialist politics"[2].

In Germany the WIR entered production via the Prometheus company, acquired in 1925. Prometheus produced a number of films with a working class point of view, the best known of which are Jutzi's MOTHER KRAUSE'S JOURNEY TO HAPPINESS (1929) and Dudow's KUHLE WAMPE (1932). It also pioneered in the distribution of Soviet films in Europe, scoring a notable success with POTEMKIN in 1926. In 1928 Muenzenberg founded Weltfilm to handle nontheatrical distribution of workers' and Soviet films: this firm first popularized the use of 16mm for such screenings.

The WIR's next move was clearly to stimulate indigenous production in the other countries in which it operated. Since capital was not available for studio production, emphasis inevitably came to be placed on low cost documentary and especially newsreel forms; there were also good political reasons for this choice. To undertake such production the WIR had an instrument ready at hand: the workers' photo leagues, which had already been widely established to provide visual coverage of working class subjects for the left-wing press. Where feasible, existing leagues were charged with movie production, and others were formed, such that by 1930 or a little later film and photo sections of the WIR were operative in Germany, England, France, Holland, Switzerland, Austria, Japan and the United States.

In the US the WIR affiliate, at first known as the Friends of Soviet Russia, had been involved with film distribution since its founding in 1922. Throughout the decade it arranged nationwide release of documentaries about the Soviet Union designed to counteract the hostile propaganda emanating from Hollywood, and beginning in 1926 it also handled nontheatrical distribution (and, effectively, exhibition) of Soviet features. This distribution arm of the WIR was to become closely allied with the Workers Film and Photo League.

In 1930 the breakthrough into production was made. On March 6 of that year a Communist-led demonstration of the unemployed had resulted in probably the largest such crowds in US history jamming into New York's Union Square, but the capitalist press had minimized the event and commercial newsreels of the demonstration had been suppressed at the behest of New York police chief Grover Whalen--no doubt partly because they exposed the brutality of his officers in action. As the economic situation worsened, protest marches, rallies and manifestations became more frequent and the bourgeois media continued to ignore or distort them. It was clear that there was an urgent need for workers' newsreels.

In May, Daily Worker film critic Samuel Brody wrote:

> I want once more to emphasize the newsfilm is the important thing; that the capitalist class knows that there are certain things that it cannot afford to have shown. It is afraid of some pictures....
>
> Films are being used against the workers like police clubs, only more subtly--like the reactionary press. If the capitalist class fears pictures and prevents us from seeing records of events like the March 6 unemployment demonstration and the Sacco-Vanzetti trial we will equip our own cameramen and make our own films.[3]

Less than two weeks later, again in the Daily Worker, the call for workers' movie production was reiterated. Radical poet and film critic Harry Alan Potamkin argued:

> The German workers have started well. There is no need to begin big. Documentaries of workers life. Breadlines and picketlines, demonstrations and police-attacks. Outdoor films first. Then interiors. And eventually dramatic films of revolutionary content. Workers' organizations should support a group to be pioneers on this important front.[4]

Even as the call was being made, the WIR was mobilizing its cinematic forces. The same month it was able to announce that "movies of the unforgettable May Day parade and demonstration in New York City will be one of the features of the mass celebration of the Five Year Plan, to be held at Ulmer Park, Brooklyn, this Saturday, May 31, Defend the Soviet Union Day"[5]. The film may have been obtained from an independent source, or it may possibly have constituted the first output

of a fledgling Workers Film and Photo League, whose exact founding date I have been unable to pin down. In any case, it is fair to assume that within a few months the League was in operation, filming workers' events and exhibiting the results at workers' gatherings in precisely the fashion of these 1930 May Day movies.

The key New York WFPL participants at the beginning were, as Leo Seltzer indicates, Sam Brody (practising what he preached), Lester Balog, Robert Del Duca, and a little later Seltzer himself. Of the group members Del Duca had the most practical experience, having worked as a newsreel cameraman and laboratory technician; Brody was clearly the theoretician and political overseer. Handling the WIR's film department, and thus intimately involved with arranging distribution and exhibition of—and often finance for—the League's productions, was Tom Brandon.

This core group was augmented in subsequent years by a larger membership, outstanding among whom were the writers and critics Potamkin, Lewis Jacobs, Leo T. Hurwitz, David Platt, Jay Leyda (for a short period prior to his departure for the Soviet Union) and Irving Lerner, and the still photographer and experimental filmmaker Ralph Steiner. For the most part these men were less involved with the League's production work than with its other activities: publications (program notes, contributions to New Theatre, the Daily Worker, and Filmfront); lectures and discussions; film series screenings; photographic exhibitions; anti-censorship agitation; boycott campaigns; film school and photo courses. By 1934 Balog was in California (where, as a member of the San Francisco FPL, he was jailed for showing ROAD TO LIFE and COTTONPICKERS' STRIKE to agricultural workers); and in the fall of that year Hurwitz, Lerner and Steiner broke away to form Nykino. Soon after, Seltzer secured work as a filmmaker with the WPA, and most of the League's production in the last year or two of its existence seems to have been handled by Del Duca, Julian Roffman (who, like Brody, Brandon, Hurwitz, Platt and Lerner wrote on film topics for the Daily Worker), and Vic Kandel. Nancy Naumburg and James Guy did pioneering work, with the League's assistance, on the dramatized political documentary in 16mm.

The nature of the League's output may be gauged by reference to the filmography. But "output" is perhaps a misleading term. As Seltzer insists, the group was not challenging Hollywood on its own terms, manufacturing motion pictures as merchandise. Rather than individual "films", it is more correct to speak, for the bulk of (W)FPL production (which is probably much greater than that indicated here) of "footage"--news film which was processed and printed rapidly and then roughly edited for the quickest possible screening and maximum impact. Once the topical moment had passed, of course, the footage became available for recutting into later compilation documentaries, and it is to this class that most of the League's major productions--NATIONAL HUNGER MARCH, BONUS MARCH, HUNGER 1932--belong.

Though the newsreels did sometimes receive theatrical screenings (particularly during 1932, at New York's Cameo Theatre), they were mostly exhibited by the (W)FPL members themselves, often along with a Soviet film, in a specifically political context. Taking films to the workers became a potent organizing device, as the following quotation from a Communist Party unit organizer indicates:

> Our shop unit in the Caterpillar plant is only about six months old. And while we are getting new contacts on the job (the plant has been working a few days a week and now closed down indefinitely), we found that shop-gate meetings are a great help in approaching workers on their problems.
>
> On March 1st a Party speaker held a meeting at the shop during noon hour. After the meeting the workers discussed a great deal amongst themselves on how to solve the conditions in favor of the workers. During the same time the Workers International Relief was showing a Russian movie to which the workers were invited. And for the next few days the workers in the plant were discussing the lack of unemployment in Russia and the millions of unemployed here. These discussions among the workers gave (the Party members) the opportunity to comment and help them along and thereby find out who is who in the shop.
>
> As a result of the shop-gate meetings outside and our work inside we have now a functioning group of the Metal Trades Industrial League and have recruited seven new members to the Party unit (we started the shop unit with three members).[6]

As might be expected, the content of (W)FPL newsreels and longer films was conditioned by the particular campaigns being undertaken by the CP. Here it is essential to recall that the period 1929-34 was one of militant class struggle for the world Communist movement. Party strategy in the US (as elsewhere) was to build the strength of the movement by stimulating recruitment into (a) the "revolutionary" unions--those affiliated to the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), (b) the Party's "mass organizations"--of which the WIR was one, and (c) the Party itself.

Thus the footage devoted to the miners' strikes of 1931 and 1932 played its part in assisting the drive to organize the coalminers of Western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee--then destitute and disillusioned with John L. Lewis's leadership of the United Mine Workers--into the TUUL-affiliated National Miners Union (NMU). On the West Coast there was an energetic campaign to build the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, reflected in several of the Los Angeles WFPL productions.

Organization of the unemployed was undertaken via the Unemployed Councils around the demands for immediate relief and a comprehensive program of social insurance. These demands were dramatized by numerous local and two national hunger marches. The national marches, held in December 1931 and December 1932, became occasions for coordinated newsreel coverage by WFPL cameramen around the country--the WIR arranging the filmed record along with food, shelter and medical care for the marchers. A hunger march in Detroit on March 7, 1932, filmed by members of the local League, became a massacre when police opened fire and killed four demonstrators; the film survives.

The Bonus March of 1932 was not Communist-led, but the Party did try to extend its influence among the out-of-work veterans through the participation of its "mass organization," the Workers Ex-Servicemen's League (WESL), whose banners are prominent in the powerful League film devoted to the march, camp, and eviction.

The Scottsboro Case was used by the Party to focus attention on lynch law in the South and the oppression of blacks generally; it conducted a militant defense through its International Labor Defense organization and held many rallies demanding the release of the accused men. This activity was reinforced by several newsreels and a short film made for the ILD, with assistance from the League, by Leo T. Hurwitz.

Other films, as their titles and descriptions indicate, focused on further pressure points in the class struggle and helped fulfill the League's reported purpose of "the taking of newsreels of demonstrations, meetings, Party activities and other affairs of immediate, daily concern to the American working-class."[7]

Cinema-verité has dulled our appreciation of participant camerawork, but in the Thirties the handheld, close-range cinematography of street actions which the League footage offered must have struck spectators with great novelty and force. Leo Seltzer stresses the importance of his physical involvement in the events he was shooting in conveying excitement, and writing of his participation in the filming of HUNGER 1932, Brody makes a similar point. Brody, however, lays emphasis--as Seltzer does not--on the political commitment of the filmmakers:

> I was a member of a group of four cameramen sent by the New York section of the Workers Film and Foto League to cover the activities of Column 8 of the National Hunger March on its way to Washington from New York City.
>
> Soon there will be shown to the workers of New York the evidence gathered by the keen eyes of our cameras. This evidence is totally unlike anything shown in newsreels taken by capitalist concerns. Our cameramen were class-conscious workers who understood the historical significance of this epic March for bread and the right to live. As a matter of fact, we 'shot' the March not as 'disinterested' news-gatherers but as actual participants in the March itself. Therein lies the importance of our finished film. It is the viewpoint of the marchers themselves. Whereas the capitalist cameramen who followed the marchers all the way down to Washington were constantly on the lookout for sensational material which would distort the character of the March in the eyes of the masses, our worker cameramen, working with small hand-cameras that permit unrestricted mobility, succeeded in recording incidents that show the fiendish brutality of the police towards the marchers....[8]

It was in camerawork, and not in editing, that the newsreels were distinguished, but in the longer compilation films there are some striking sequences of montage in the Soviet manner. BONUS MARCH, for example, edited by Leo Seltzer and Lester Balog, opens with a prologue which sketches the background to the contemporary situation; this sequence is a model of savage political comment in film. Without detailing the complete editing of the prologue, it is possible to give an indication of the sequence's content, and its power, by listing the shots and groups of following shots, which appear basically in the order given here. Some of these shots appear several times at key points, adding considerably to the drama and commentary of the prologue.

1. A title: "1917..."
2. Swinging sign: "Go Places with the US Army"
3. Sign: "Adventure Over the World" and doughboy
4. Mass parade of troops
5. Battlefield: tanks and troops advance
6. Cannons fire
7. Shell explodes, blows up building
8. Shell explodes on battlefield
9. Tanks, soldiers in battle
10. Battleships (various shots)
11. Interior, ship's gun barrel
12. Ship's gun fire
13. Turret rotates
14. Explosion, smoking warship
15. Warplane
16. Soldiers advance
17. Explosion in the trenches
18. Dead on battlefield
19. Injured, maimed vets (one stretcher patient, one legless man) line up to be greeted at a garden party
20. US flag
21. Churches
22. Down-and-out unemployed worker on bench
23. Priest
24. Heroic statuary
25. "Catholic Charities" sign
26. US Eagle sign on Bank of the United States building
27. Unemployed man, close-up; and others
28. Salvation Army signs
29. A waterside Hooverville--shacks, one of the inhabitants
30. Breadline (various shots, coming closer to the men).

Following documentation of WESL agitation, the march to Washington and the encampment, the film begins its sequence of the eviction with a quick reprise of the opening statement--a title "1917..." and shots of marching troops, tanks on the battlefield, an explosion, the wounded given a garden party reception--then "1932..." and the U.S. infantry attacks down Pennsylvania Avenue, backed up by the cavalry, and the armored division.

The montage of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the AMERICA TODAY sequence referred to in the interview by Seltzer offers another example of creative montage used to make a political point forcefully and economically. The CP line at the time was

that Roosevelt was preparing for aggressive war and that the New Deal represented incipient fascism. The sequence is cut as follows: troops parade through streets/Mussolini salutes/troops march, give fascist salutes/fascist salute, PAN to reveal arm is Hitler's/US battleship, TILT UP to following ship/FDR signing document, reaches for blotter, lays it down, makes a fist to blot/cannons fired on navy cruiser/front view, guns are raised/interior, gun barrel/cannons fired/FDR looks up and smiles/dark cloud, DISSOLVE to NRA Eagle sign and inscription: "We Do Our Part".

Seltzer was quite content working strictly within a newsreel/documentary mode. By 1934, however, some dissatisfaction was being felt among other League members with this approach. It was in recognition of this and anticipation of arguments to come that Brody wrote the article "The Revolutionary Film: Problem of Form" reproduced in this issue. The riposte came in New Theatre three months later, when Hurwitz described the work being done by an experimental group at the League's Harry Alan Potamkin Film School, and stated:

> ...the plan is to develop this experimental group into a production group within the Film and Photo League for the purpose of making documentary-dramatic revolutionary films--short propaganda films that will serve as flaming film-slogans, satiric films and films exposing the brutalities of capitalist society.[9]

The plan encountered rough going, and the issue remains a controversial one among former FPL members. There is not space here to develop the ramifications of the dispute, which centered on financial priorities rather than either/or aesthetic commitments, but the upshot was that the FPL did not approve Hurwitz's proposal for a "shock-troupe of full time film workers," and in the fall of 1934 he, Steiner and Lerner broke away to form the nucleus of a radical filmmaking collective known as "Nykino." Theoretical statements issued by Steiner and Hurwitz at this time are listed in the bibliography.

Meanwhile, in September, the FPL rededicated itself to the business of unvarnished newsreel production at a National Conference held in Chicago. Reference has so far been made primarily to the New York section of the League, but in fact branches existed in many cities of the country. Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles were the most active in terms of production, but there were strong groups also in Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, and local FPL organizations were reported at one time or another in Pittsburgh; Hollywood; New Haven, Connecticut; Perth Amboy, N.J.; Laredo, Texas; and the University of Wisconsin.

The Conference resolved that, "The tremendous growth of the working class movement coupled with the increase of strikes and class warfare makes it imperative for the Film and Photo League to concentrate its best film and photo forces on the field of battle, adequately to record the vital events of our time." 16mm was adopted as the basic stock for local use, 35mm being retained for original photography at the national level. A National Film Exchange was set up, and a National Executive Committee elected--with David Platt as National Secretary and Tom Brandon a member.[10]

Work continued. In 1934-35 Leo Seltzer produced, with Ed Kern, his much-praised MARINE, and Nancy Naumburg, with James Guy, directed two longish political films (with acted sequences), SHERIFFED and TAXI, the latter of which became an official FPL production. All these films are lost, and reviews provide only frustrating hints as to their content and technique.

It was evident that there were weaknesses in the movement. In November 1934 novelist and Daily Worker columnist Michael Gold expressed his disappointment:

> Our Film and Photo League has been in existence for some years, but outside of a few good newsreels, hasn't done much to bring this great cultural weapon to the working class.
>
> As yet, they haven't produced a single reel of comedy, agitation, satire or working-class drama.

And invoking THREE SONGS ABOUT LENIN, he concluded: "I hope somebody in the Film and Photo League learns how to do a film as tenth as good for proletarian America."[11] In response, Platt could only admit that the charge was "very true"--"no one knows better how true it is than the Film and Photo League itself, which has been struggling for years to produce films on a budget and with forces that would have wrecked a similar bourgeois organization"--and promise to do better in the future.[12]

The League members no doubt continued to struggle, but history was against them. The WIR, reeling under the annihilation of its German operations in the Third Reich, suffered a second grievous blow in 1935, when the CPSU abolished its Russian section. Muenzenberg, now devoting himself to anti-fascist propaganda from Paris, was no longer with the organization. It managed to survive in several European countries (amalgamated with the International Red Aid), but in the US its activities seem to have come to a standstill by mid-decade. The League might have kept going as an independent entity--it did continue into 1936--but without the organizational backing, financial support, or political directions its parent body was able to provide there must have seemed little point in keeping it alive. After editing a feature-length documentary on the Chinese Revolution from commercial newsreel footage as a noble last gesture to the League, filmmakers Julian Roffman, Vic Kandel and veteran Robert Del Duca formed themselves into an independent production company, and an era in American radical cinema was at an end.

I would like to thank Leo Seltzer, Tom Brandon, and David Platt for assistance with my research into the League.

Footnotes

1. Willi Muenzenberg, "Capture the Film!", Daily Worker, July 23, 1925, p. 3.

2. Willi Muenzenberg, Solidarität: Zehn Jahre Internationale Arbeiterhilfe, 1921-1931 (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1931), p. 513.

3. S(amuel) B(rody), "The Movies as a Weapon Against the Working Class," Daily Worker, May 20, 1930, p. 4.

4. Harry A. Potamkin, "Workers Films," Daily Worker, May 31, 1930, p. 3.

5. Daily Worker, May 28, 1930, p. 1.

6. Party Organizer, 5, No. 8 (August 1932), 27.

7. S(eymour) S(tern), "A Working-Class Cinema for America", The Left 1, No. 1 (Spring 1931), 71.

8. Samuel Brody, "The Hunger March Film," Daily Worker, December 29, 1932, p. 4.

9. Leo T. Hurwitz, "The Revolutionary Film--Next Step", New Theatre, 3, No. 6 (May 1934), 15.

10. David Platt, "The Movie Front: National Film Conference," New Theatre, 1, No. 10 (November 1934), 30.

11. Michael Gold, "Change the World!", Daily Worker, November 5, 1934, p. 7.

12. David Platt, "World of the Movies: A Reply to Michael Gold," Daily Worker, November 16, 1934, p. 5. ■

II. Interview with Leo Seltzer

"A TOTAL AND REALISTIC EXPERIENCE"

--Russell Campbell

After learning his craft at the Film and Photo League, Leo Seltzer worked as a filmmaker for the WPA, the National Film Board of Canada, and the Signal Corps. Following the war he became a New York-based documentary producer-director-writer, where he helped establish the City's film and TV unit. His films have won awards at the Edinburgh, Cannes, and Venice Film Festivals, and in 1948 his FIRST STEPS, produced for the U.N. Division of Social Affairs, was awarded an Oscar as Best Documentary. Leo Seltzer was Cinema-Biographer to the White House during the Kennedy Administration. He has taught film at Columbia University, City College of New York, the New School, New York University and the Philadelphia Museum College of Art, and is currently instructor in Film Production Workshop at the School of the Visual Arts and Director of the Film and Television Therapy Workshop, Children's Ward, New York University Medical Center. I interviewed him on October 28, 1976 in New York City.

RC: Could you say something about how you first got involved in filmmaking?

LS: I first got involved in filmmaking in 1930 or 1931. My background was an interest in art: I'd gone to art school, and I also went to college. I was going to be an engineer, but during the Depression it seemed rather hopeless to continue through college, and I came back to New York and returned to art school. With my technical knowhow, I was able to do some wiring in the art studio: we needed some lights for a model. The building was sort of a combine of clubs--there was a photography club and an art school and so on, and after I'd wired the lights in the art school, the photography group needed some wiring done in the darkroom. I went over there, and in the short time I stayed there doing that wiring I became interested in what they were doing, it seemed intriguing, and I gave up my art studies and moved over to there. That was the early Film and Photo League.

RC: You became a still photographer?

LS: For a few months. I had a camera and was doing still photography. We used to cover all sorts of demonstrations and whatever was happening, strikes, picket lines and so on. Then there was a hunger march in 1931 and a movie camera was put in my hands and I was told to go out and shoot, probably because there was no one else available, or perhaps because I used to bring in rather unusual still photographs.

RC: Who were your associates at this time?

LS: The early FPL members besides myself were Robert Del Duca and Lester Balog. And then there was another who was very much a part of it but more verbal than functional. You might say that he was functional in an intellectual sense--and that was Sam Brody. He was somewhat of a writer and a talker and a screamer. Those who did most of the filming, editing and screening were Del Duca, Balog and I.

There was no committee. A number of people who made only casual contact with the League claim to being the League, and they really weren't. The FPL attracted quite a number of people with different motivations. Some stayed with it. Others who had different goals moved through the League on to other things--like Ralph Steiner, Leo Hurwitz and Irving Lerner. It's not a question of discrediting one or the other except to straighten the record. Steiner, Hurwitz and Lerner were not involved in the day-to-day production activities of the League. They were more involved in the theoretical and dramatic aspects of film, and they moved on to do outstanding things in other areas.

Balog was mainly an inside man--he worked on art work and editing. On the shooting it was Del Duca and I, though most of it was done by me because Del worked, he had a steady job with Otis Elevator. The image I have: very often, there was this little round table and there'd be a group of four or five guys sitting there, the theoreticians, sitting talking, philosophizing: "How do you . . . ?" "Why do you . . . ?" "When do you . . . ?" "What's the political reasons for it?" And then someone would say, "Hey, something's happening! Call Seltzer!" And I'd take the Eyemo under my arm and go out and shoot.

Hurwitz, Lerner and possibly a few other "casual" members had ambitions that leaned towards Hollywood, of doing the Hollywood thing, perhaps differently. Lerner finally made it to Hollywood. I think it was much more of an ego drive with those guys--to be somebody rather than to do something. Del and I and Lester, we didn't have that desire. We worked on the day-to-day realistic documentary productions. The filmmaking and distribution activities of the League had nothing to do with what Hollywood producers or commercial distributors

East River, NYC
PHOTO: Leo Seltzer

were doing. Ours was a total involvement in what was happening in the world on a very practical and realistic level. We filmed the everyday social scene, the economic struggle, and we put it together to represent a realistic, not dramatized point of view, and then we carried those heavy-weight "portable" projectors and the films back to the union halls and the picket lines and showed them to an audience that was the living subject of the films.

It was a total and realistic experience and not a dramatic or philosophical exercise. For me the Film and Photo League activity was a way of life, often working all day and most of the night, sleeping on a desk or editing table wrapped in the projection screen, eating food that might have been contributed for relief purposes and wearing clothes that were donated.

I was quite naive politically and really wasn't involved for any cause. My filmmaking activity--there was just no alternative as far as I was concerned. It was relevant, it was important, it was exciting. It was something that I was almost intuitively involved in, the kind of people I was filming were the same kind of people I was. It was a challenging and real experience.

RC: Was there a guiding philosophy for the League?

LS: Oh yes. The parent organization of the Film and Photo League was the Workers International Relief. Its main purpose was to supply food, clothing and housing to strikers, in order to enable them to stay out and hopefully eventually get what they were striking for. They were quite active in the South, and in Pennsylvania in the mine fields. And under the W.I.R. there were also cultural groups. It was felt that the theatre and the film and other media could both entertain and inform. That's what really gave birth to the Film and Photo League and to other groups: a dance group, the Workers Laboratory Theatre--from which a number of outstanding performers developed--and other cultural activities. These were grouped in one place, and that's where I was studying art.

The film group also became the center for receiving the early Russian films. There was no official (commercial, nontheatrical) distributor setup, and Thomas Brandon was running nontheatrical distribution at that time. Our job in addition to shooting was to keep these films repaired, and sometimes we'd take those Russian films out and show them on our portable projectors, if there was time and a chance to entertain workers and pickets. We used to look at those films quite often. Sometimes late at night we'd run them off for ourselves, Lester, Del, and I. That really was a transition period in the development of film as an art. That was really where film editing began, and no Russian films have matched those early silent ones in that respect. We used to look at them over and over and over, and study them. Our job was to inspect them when they came back from screening, and we could study them frame by frame. This was all 35mm nitrate film.

Another activity of the Film and Photo League was with stills. We had no way of getting any money from our film work. We had no money at all. Food came in for the miners and we'd help ourselves to a couple of cans of beans once in a while. Among the clothes that came in we'd find something to fit us. We lived off that and felt that we gave back as much as we took out. And if you had a quarter in your pocket--fantastic! I remember a friend of mine, we took a cab once, and it cost a quarter, this person was paying a quarter, and I thought--Jesus, I could live a couple of days on that. Money was non-existent for us. So one of the ways of getting a little money for FPL members was by selling photographs. Motion picture film couldn't be sold, no one would want to buy it, the newsreels had their own crews going out. But we could sell photographs, because very often we could get things the commercial news photographers couldn't get. So I took quite a lot of photographs as well as movies, and these could be sold to the newspapers to get a few bucks. A lot of times we'd know about a picket line or something that was going to happen, we could scoop the press, and that's what made our photos valuable.

RC: Would the camerman act as his own director on the League films?

LS: There was no formal directing because you couldn't control your subject matter. Documentary coverage depended on where you were, how long your shot was and how you moved your camera. I directed this way for years before I realized I was directing! It never was a separate activity from filming. If the cops are breaking up a picket line you can't tell them where to go or what to do, it's your position and how long and what the angle is and where the light is, and usual things of that sort, and of course the editing was an integral part of your filmmaking. I could not separate directing from camerawork or editing. We did everything on our films, including writing the titles and shooting them. Lester Balog, who was the artist, used to do the titles by hand and we'd photograph them. Lester also did some editing. Sometimes rearrangement had to be done of some of these old Russian films, they were damaged or something, and sometimes we'd get newsreel footage from other states. There were Film and Photo League branches in different states, and Lester would edit that footage. But the film that I shot I couldn't possibly give to anyone else to edit, it was an integral part of a complete activity from beginning to end, from shooting to showing the finished film. Now it's a new idea--the auteur--but in those days it was the natural way of filmmaking for me.

We didn't feel it necessary to put our names on our films. It seems that we got enough satisfaction from the activity itself, so at present there is some misunderstanding about who made the Film and Photo League films. In NATIVE LAND, which was done by another group of filmmakers, they used FPL material without proper credit. That was some rough action I filmed when the first Nazi emissary came to the United States. He arrived by a boat which docked in a remote area in Brooklyn, and a picket line was set up there. The police really beat up and arrested many of the demonstrators, and it was one of the sequences in the AMERICA TODAY newsreel which we made at the FPL.

There was also some interesting editing that I did in one of the AMERICA TODAY reels which has often been mentioned but not properly credited. This was just after Prohibition was repealed, and I edited a sequence of Roosevelt signing the proclamation doing away with Prohibition. As his fist came down on the blotter over his signature, cut to battleship cannons firing, then back to Roosevelt looking up with his charming, self-satisfied smile. It was an interesting bit of editing and very effective at the time.

RC: Was it your intention in this sequence to portray Roosevelt as a militarist?

LS: The idea there, I think, when I look back at those days, was that I was more emotionally motivated. We did not accept any government official as being on our side. If he was any kind of an official he was against us and we were against him. Roosevelt did a lot of good things--the whole program of unemployment relief and social security, demanded by the hunger marchers, he finally put into effect. So when we look back at it Roosevelt was a great president. In those days my feelings were more emotionally motivated. You were involved with a group of people and what they said was right you believed was right, and what they disliked you disliked.

RC: What were the films you worked on? You mentioned AMERICA TODAY.

LS: There were a few issues of AMERICA TODAY. We turned it out regularly, and we once rented a theater, and ran a showing of those AMERICA TODAY films, a little theater on 23rd Street and Broadway. The first shooting I did was the hunger marches to Washington, and the Bonus March, plus scores of local activities--evictions, picket lines, demonstrations, whatever else was happening--of which there's probably no record any more. There used to be a lot of this film in the vaults, at Fort Lee, N.J. Years ago I catalogued it all, then the studio burned down, and the film was destroyed. It was all nitrate film, and probably would have disintegrated by now.

RC: Tell me about the BONUS MARCH film (1932).

LS: I was totally responsible for that: I was the one that went out and shot it. I went to Washington twice. The first time was when the ex-servicemen were just arriving and encamping, and I got all the marching through Washington. I don't remember how long they were there, but there was a lot of marching, a lot of demonstrating. So I got there, and the thing seemed to have settled down to some extent, nothing else was happening, so I came back to New York. Then the eviction took place. I got there just as the bonus marchers were being run out of Washington by MacArthur and the regular army, the cavalry and the tanks, and I filmed the whole area smouldering and burning, as I walked through it. The bonus marchers were already on their way, they were going to Johnstown, Pennsylvania. I walked through this place. It looked like a premature Hiroshima. Everything smouldering, bedsteads, personal belongings. There'd been families there, ex-servicemen had brought their wives and children--it was a Hooverville, right in the middle of Washington. And there was an old building that had been partly ripped out, four stories, where the bonus marchers were settled in--there were no walls, just concrete floors and cots. And then there was this order, signed by MacArthur, telling everyone to evacuate, by order of the President--I took the order itself off the wall and sent it back to Brandon--and then I followed the bonus marchers to Johnstown, where they set up another camp. We got some commercial newsreel material of the actual eviction, and I edited that in.

RC: How did you get hold of the newsreel footage?

LS: We probably had a sympathetic theater projectionist who got it for us, or someone who worked in the newsreel companies. We didn't have any formal dealings with the newsreel industry.

I also went to Washington for the Scottsboro demonstration. What happened was they were finally going to take the case to the Supreme Court, the final appeal to save the lives of those nine young men. The Supreme Court at that time occupied the right hand side of the Capitol building it didn't have a building of its own. Groups of people were coming from different states to picket in front of the Supreme Court, to show their support. It was an international issue at that time. The usual thing was to get a big truck, and everybody piled in, and that's how we got to Washington. It was the only way I could go. I'd heard that they weren't going to allow any news coverage of this demonstration, because the Washington cops were going to teach these "Communists" a lesson. Washington already had the taste of the hunger march before that.

There was a fairly small group of pickets, and in those days Washington was a real Southern town. I'd heard that you'd never see a picture of a black person in Washington newspapers: if inadvertently there was a black face in a crowd photo it was airbrushed white. Washington was an area of total discrimination then. So they were going to beat the hell out of these pickets to teach them a lesson. I figured the only way of getting close enough to take pictures was to get into the line of marchers, and after we marched into the area in front of the Capitol Building I got out of the line and started shooting film. Then things started to happen. There were a lot of plainclothes men and police around. The cops jumped at this group and started ripping placards off, and beating people up.

I was filming this one policeman. It was a rainy day, and he had on a heavy, rubberized raincoat. I was about ten or fifteen feet behind him, and two or three feet beyond him was the line of pickets, with the Capitol dome beyond that. That was the shot. And as I was shooting, the cop ran in and grabbed the placard from a black marcher, and ripped the cardboard. And there was this marcher with the stick still in his hand. The marcher looked at the bare stick, and the cop was tearing up the placard which said, "Free the Scottsboro Boys," and suddenly the marcher turned and whacked the cop left and right with his stick. And the cop was so stunned, he just stood there.

And then suddenly my camera went straight up into the air. I turned around and there was this man, who seemed seven feet tall and seven feet wide, with my camera, which was 9 lbs. of solid weight, tucked under his arm as if it was nothing, pushing everybody around. So I went after him, tapping him on the back. I said, "My camera, there's a job I have to do." And then they started shooting teargas, and before I knew it this guy turned around and grabbed me by the neck, lifted me with one hand and threw me into the police wagon. He threw my camera in after me. That gave me some elevation, so I took my camera and started shooting out of the paddy wagon door. I got another shot or two before he took the camera away from me.

About twenty-five people were arrested. Before we came to trial--the charge was parading without a permit--we were in jail for two days. Finally the trial took place, and each person who was arrested was identified by the arresting officer, who got up on the witness stand and told why he arrested that person. Finally they got to me, and this fat creep, who I later found out was head of the Red Squad in Washington, D.C., got up and said, "Yeah, I saw this fellow, he was marching, and he kept jumping out of line. I kept pushing him back, and he wouldn't stay in line, so I arrested him." The lawyer said, "Oh, you were trying to force him to march even though he didn't have a permit?" The judge banged his gavel on the bench and said, "Case dismissed!"

After that I went back to the police station to get my camera, and there it was lying on the desk. I had a still camera with me too, and a newspaper article said something about "photographer armed with two cameras." So I went back to get my camera, and there was this young cop there, and he was sneering as he said, "You know, one of these days you Communists are going to rule the world, but until then we're going to make you eat . . . ." Fortunately he had not opened the camera, and the film was intact.

The sequence of the black picket beating up the cop was included in an AMERICA TODAY program we showed in the theater we rented during the 1930s. When that sequence was shown the audience jumped up and said, "Give it to him! Give it to him!" About three years ago, when Brandon was screening this at the Museum of Modern Art, the response of the young college kids who saw it, who actually had no real identification with the situation which happened over forty years ago, was exactly the same. When this scene came on they all got up and yelled, "Give it to him!" Give it to him!"

I think the idea is not necessarily that I considered myself one of the pickets, or had the same motivation, it was just that in my own approach I felt I had to get right into things to shoot. I had to experience what I was filming, and that was the uniqueness of both my stills and my films. Few people had seen that point of view in films before. If I had been more politically motivated I think that would have determined where I stood almost all the time I did my shooting. But because I wasn't, I had no apprehension about going up on the cops' side as well as the pickets' side, and getting a total point of view. The commercial newsreels had those big vans for their equipment, and they set the camera up on top. They'd park about a block away with a telephoto lens, and their films never really gave you a sense of being involved. My film had that quality because I was physically involved in what I was filming, and that's what I think gave it a unique and exciting point of view.

RC: This was all in 35mm?

LS: Yes. The camera I used was the Eyemo, which was spring driven, like the Filmo, but whereas the Filmo, a 16mm camera, ran 2½ minutes of film, the Eyemo ran only about a minute. You learned to reload pretty fast.

RC: When did 16mm come in?

LS: There was one film I did in 16mm, in 1934. Somebody gave us a 16mm camera, and I went out and did a film on the life of longshoremen, called MARINE. It probably could lay claim to being one of the first social documentary films made in this country--if you remember that Flaherty always dealt with man against nature, and this film was about man against man. MARINE has never been located, but it had some fantastic shots of what was called the "shape-up." In those days--and still today, I think--the way you got a job as a longshoreman on the docks was to show up in the morning, and the boss would stand up on a box, and he'd have these little brass discs with numbers on them. He'd stand there looking over these three or four hundred men, holding out their hands, begging, and he'd flip one out to one guy, flip one out to another guy. He flipped them out to guys who he knew would kick back some of their pay to him--it was all pre-arranged. But the shots of these guys during the Depression, begging for one of these little brass things which meant food . . . . I got up, again in my naivete, up there right on the box next to him, and got a shot of these longshoremen begging for their bread. The film dealt quite completely with the life of longshoremen, from early morning to night. Many of them were homeless, sleeping on the docks.

RC: Some sources credit Edward Kern as the director of MARINE.

LS: Ed Kern was the one who probably initiated the film, and I think he paid for the raw stock. He came along for moral support, but not directing. There was no such thing as a separate director on our documentary filming, and Ed had no background in directing.

RC: Were you working with sound at all in that period?

LS: No. We didn't work with sound. Sound was just coming in. Equipment was very bulky and expensive. At the theater we rented to show our newsreels, I put together two turntables and got a bunch of classical records, and I would shift from record to record, and pick pieces for each particular sequence. Sync sound was impossible for us.

Color was still experimental, and besides there was a feeling that this kind of subject matter looked better in black-and-white--in those days color wasn't at all realistic. Also,

Rent Strike: Upper East Side of Manhattan PHOTO: Leo Seltzer

the fact of not using sound or color required more visual awareness in filming. Consider what happened to the Russian films. As soon as they started making sound films, most of that wonderful visual quality which they had developed disappeared from their films.

In editing documentary footage you can't rely on narrative, or on chronology for continuity. You had to figure out other elements of continuity--light, contrast, visual design, the way movement takes place, camera or subject movement--and you became aware of all those things, you practised them, you tried them out, you had to really exercise your ingenuity. You had to improvise new ways of shooting and cutting. It was a tremendous training ground in visual awareness and mobility for me.

RC: Did you have a well-established network for exchanging footage between the various League branches?

LS: Every once in a while someone would come in from San Francisco, or another city, or send some film in of something that happened. With the hunger march we tried to organize local coverage so we'd have background film to edit in. But mostly it was spontaneous. We used to do most of the editing here in New York--they'd send us their film, because they didn't have the facilities or the equipment. It was not easy to get editing equipment in those days, it was expensive. We never had any moviolas. And there were probably no labs except in California and New York. We did our editing by feel, by intuition, and then we'd run it off and see if it looked right. We had no viewers, just rewinds and an old Griswold splicer, and a so-called portable projector, which weighed about a ton.

RC: Nancy Naumburg made two quite long films, SHERIFFED and TAXI, which sound interesting for their dramatized documentary method. Did she work directly with the League on those?

LS: She did them on her own. She used the League as a kind of sounding board to get technical guidance and distribution. Nancy used to do her own shooting; she had her own equipment, her own ideas, her own motivations. She was shooting 16mm. She was a nice, gentle person, I remember, and very serious. But those films were done outside of the League's day-to-day activities.

RC: Where did you exhibit League films?

LS: We showed them in union halls, at fraternal group meetings, national clubs, workers clubs. Once in a while to a church group. But mainly as morale builders to pickets. Whenever there was a picket line we covered it and came back and showed the pickets themselves on the picket line. It was a tremendous morale booster. Plus maybe a Russian film, or maybe the TAXI film, or the waterfront film, to give them an idea other people were also struggling for better conditions. We had some footage of the Kentucky strike, and the Pittsburgh strike. I don't know who shot the Pittsburgh film, but I went back with a projector to show it to the miners who were still blacklisted. They were still living in tents for the second winter. And I remember I went into the town and we stretched this sheet between two houses--the sheriff's and the deputy's house on either side--and we expected to be shot at any minute while projecting the film.

RC: Is any of the original FPL footage still in existence, still available for screening?

LS: Yes, during the last few years Tom Brandon has located a number of the original films, the Hunger Marches of 1931 and 1932, the Bonus March, AMERICA TODAY including the Scottsboro and Nazi emissary demonstrations, and a few others. I am presently reconstructing these films and adding missing titles so that they can be seen again. I think as I am working on them now that they are just as relevant today as they were over forty years ago when they were made. They are a record of a significant period of America's social-economic history as well as important historical films. ■

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III. Interview with Samuel Brody

THE CAMERA AS A WEAPON IN THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Waterfront, NYC
PHOTO: Leo Seltzer

--Tony Safford

As American left-wing film production of the thirties enjoys a cautious "renaissance," people seriously concerned with the nature and meaning of the Marxist film look back on that period with respect, amazement and, no doubt, a certain degree of romanticizing. Samuel Brody, an organizer of the Workers Film and Photo League and writer for the journals New Theater and Experimental Cinema, recalls the first days of American radical film production and its legacy with all its vitality and characteristic ideological flavor. He remains today an upholder of the League's original position on the Marxist film: the rapid and continual production of newsreels, short documentaries and compilations "born in the heat of the class upheavals of the time." Here Dziga Vertov is admittedly Brody's main source of inspiration. He, more than anyone else, provided a format and method for the creation of left-wing films in the early thirties and many radical documentaries since then (although it is odd how Brody glosses over the neglected work of Victor Turin). On the theoretical level, the films of Vertov and the early efforts of the League attempted to deal with the problem of what was called "external montage," the comparison and contrast of shots externally related to one another so as to produce an effect not contained in any individual shot or, as Brody described it, "reality recorded on film strips and . . . built up into wholes embodying our revolutionary interpretation of events." While sounding perhaps like Eisenstein, this is more correctly a restatement of Vertov's formula: "kino-see + kino-write + kino-organize = Kino-Eye" (cinematic truth). And following Vertov, Brody warned that the cinema in the class struggle knows no "'happy medium' between the histrionic recreation of reality and directly recorded reality itself." It was this extreme and rather limited position held by the leadership of the League which, in 1935, forced its split and the formation of Nykino and eventually Frontier Films by Leo Hurwitz, Ralph Steiner, Paul Strand and others under greater inspiration from Pudovkin, Dovzhenko and Joris Ivens than Vertov. This split was not without bitterness however, and Brody still refers to those forming Frontier Films as "an elitest group . . . who looked upon us as the great unwashed" and he is contemptuous of their "enacted, recreated 'features,' produced over considerably longer amounts of time--block-buster productions, so to speak." Brody's intellectual integrity (inflexibility?) disallowed any compromise with this talented group and thus he effectively barred himself from any active participation in Frontier Films, thought by many to be the most important American left-wing film group. Finally, it ought to be kept in mind that Brody's reverence for Vertov is not based upon studying his ontological film-essays, as is so very much in vogue today. For Brody, Vertov is, like himself, a filmmaker single-mindedly dedicated to perfecting the cinema as a weapon in the class struggle. The rest, according to Brody, is cheap talk.

Q: Could you tell me something about your intellectual and artistic development. How did you start in left-wing film production? Influences?

A: False modesty aside, I'd prefer to touch ever so lightly on what you call my "intellectual and artistic development." My formal education consists of less than a year in New York's high school for precocious boys--Townsend Harris at CCNY. Picked up the little I've learned from roaming the bookstalls along the Seine in Paris, the used bookstalls on 125th St. and the incredible library of the YMHA at 92nd St. and Lexington Avenue in New York. My old man was a journeyman tailor whose life was consumed and ground to dust in London, Paris, and New York sweatshops. Yet he still found time to initiate me into the eye-opening truths of Marxism and the unorthodox notion that living and acting for social change was more important than making a lot of money at the expense of one's fellow-man.

Q: To what extent do you think your generation's artistic and political commitment was due to the Soviet experience? To the internal conditions of Depression America?

A: My generation's "artistic and political commitment" predates both the Russian Revolution and the 1930's economic crisis, of course. There have always been those dedicated to revolutionary change in even comparatively "normal" periods of social development. Marxism is not a "sometime thing" as the popular song has it. The Soviet experience and the Great Depression brought into the ranks of the revolutionary movement untold numbers of people who in non-crisis times remain uncommitted and inert. The answer then is yes, the Soviet experience and the Depression had an overwhelming effect on my generation's artists, writers and intellectuals. I refer you to Daniel Aron's Writers on the Left for a detailed elaboration of this phenomenon (it's liberal dross, but the facts are there).

Q: For a young Marxist filmmaker, what was the impact of first hearing Eisenstein lecture at the Sorbonne in 1929?

A: I was well-nigh overwhelmed by the man's encyclopedic learning, his indescribable enthusiasm and vitality and exuberance. This impression was later confirmed for me when Harry Alan Potamkin and I interviewed him and Grigori Alexandrov in New York. An outsized *joie-de-vivre* and appetite for knowing, doing, probing. He told us at the time that he considered Dovzhenko the greatest Soviet director after himself and that Pudovkin was mediocre! A bizarre facet of his character was a rabelaisan taste for pornography.

Q: In retrospect it seems clear that the Workers Film and Photo League was extremely important in initiating American left-wing film production. Could you tell me something about its spirit and credo?

A: I was the founder of the Workers Film and Photo League in 1931. The organization grew out of the peripheral cultural activities of the American section of the Workers International Relief (WIR), an international organization dedicated to supporting striking workers materially and culturally. "The camera as a weapon in the class-struggle!" was our slogan. I was involved in all its organizational and creative activities in the 1930's. Its membership, fluctuating between 75 and 100, was mainly working-class with a sprinkling of middle-class intellectuals and technicians sympathetic to our progressive goals.

Q: What was the "Harry Alan Potamkin Film School"?

A: The "Harry Alan Potamkin Film School" was established by the Workers Film and Photo League to train working-class filmmakers. We needed editors, cameramen, projectionists, scripters, etc. I taught courses with Joseph Freeman, Leo T. Hurwitz, Jacobs, and Platt.

Q: Were you involved in filming the Hunger March to Washington in 1932?

A: Yes, I was involved in filming the Hunger March as well as the famous Bonus March. I was one of several cameramen sent along on the marches by the Workers Film and Photo League.

Q: Was there any government opposition to your film activities on these marches?

A: Only the routine badgerings and harassment by the FBI.

Q: You must have faced monumental problems of financing. How did you support your activities and acquire funds for film stock and other equipment?

A: It must be remembered that we shot 35mm silent, using cut-rate "short-ends" and beat-up old Eyemo and DeVry hand cameras plus the "portable" DeVry and Acme projectors. We raised money through membership dues, bazaars, and affairs. Even with the financial support of our mother organization, the Workers International Relief, it was always an uphill struggle. But our determination and dedication to the work we were doing overcame many obstacles. "Erobert Den Film!" (conquer film), proclaimed Willi Muenzenberg, the International head of the WIR, and we did!

Q: What was the impact on politically "engaged" artists like yourself on first seeing the Soviet film classics--POTEMKIN, MOTHER, OCTOBER, EARTH, TURKSIB? And to what extent did these films influence your methods?

A: What methods are you referring to? If you mean film methods, then yes, we were definitely influenced in our early gropings for a style in our newsreels and documentaries. Crude and primitive as our efforts often were, we strove to emulate the dynamism, elan and vitality of films like MOTHER and POTEMKIN. These were a revelation to us, both in form and content. When we'd get our hands on one of these films we would take it apart frame by frame, carefully analyzing each shot.

Q: What was the impact of Dziga Vertov? Why did you decide to translate writings by that director in particular?

A: I happened on the writings of Vertov in an issue of Barbusse's Monde. Not only did they confirm my conviction that the film medium was at its most effective and powerful level when its raw material was reality itself rather than the re-enactment and artificial recreation of it, but also, they revealed a new approach to filmed reality which in effect outlined a special grammar and syntax for what until then had been rather rudderless. I still believe that Vertov's contribution to film will someday be recognized for its watershed importance in the evolution of what came to be known as the "documentary," the film of reality.

Q: So you had read Vertov before seeing his films?

A: Yes. Doesn't the Bible say something about the "word came before the deed." That's wrong of course, but that's the way it was for Vertov and me.

Q: Do you see any particular format for radical filmmaking--documentary, cinema verité, and historical recreation? Did the Soviet experience play a part here?

A: Documentary. Cinema verité with an unequivocal "engagé" slant. Vertov I consider the true founder and theoretician of what is now called cinema verité. This I consider de rigeur for film form in capitalist countries. In the socialist nations where the means of

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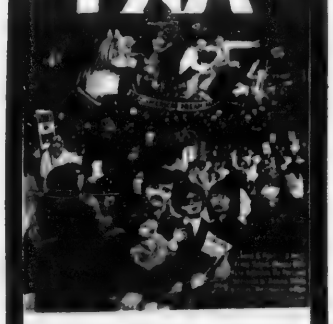

TOWARD REVOLUTIONARY ART
No. 7

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motion picture production are in the hands of the working class the problem is obviously very different. There film form can be immensely diversified to include what you call "historical recreation" (IVAN THE TERRIBLE, ALEXANDER NEVSKY, CHAPAYEV), and experimentation with other possible forms is inevitable and has already resulted in film masterpieces that rank with immortal creations in other art forms such as painting, and music.

Q: In retrospect, it seems clear that two films by Pare Lorentz, THE PLOUGH THAT BROKE THE PLAINS (1936) and THE RIVER (1937) were virtual remakes of Victor Turin's TURKSIB (1929). At the time did you sense the importance of this film?

A: I have never given any thought as to whether these films were what you call "remakes" of TURKSIB. Off the top of my head I'd say that that notion is a touch far-fetched. Certainly they were not "remakes" as far as content. Influences are not always readily traced, especially in the film medium and in a rather turbulent historical period.

Q: In France, did you know Leon Moussinac? Did he influence you in any way, or vise versa? What about Bela Balazs?

A: Yes, I knew Leon Moussinac in France in 1928 and 1929. He introduced me to Henri Barbusse for whose publication, Le Monde, I wrote a review of King Vidor's HALLELUJAH! Moussinac had a seminal influence on me as well as on a whole generation of young cinema workers. Especially influential was his remarkable pioneering study of filmic art, Naissance du cinema (Birth of Cinema) and his essays in the Communist daily newspaper, L'Humanite. An erudite Marxist thinker of the first magnitude. I never met Bela Balazs, but I had read his work, Der Sichbare Mensch, which was subsequently translated into English as The Visible Man. An attempt at an aesthetic of film--basic and learned.

Q: What led you to be associated with the journal Experimental Cinema? A co-editor of the fourth issue was Alexander Brailovsky, my grandfather. Do you by any chance remember him?

A: I became associated with Experimental Camera through my friendship with David Platt and Lewis Jacobs. They were the East Coast editors at the time. I never had the pleasure of meeting your grandfather. I do recall however that Seymour Stern sent us a manuscript that Brailovsky had submitted to him and which was rejected as being overly formalistic and obtuse for the readership we were aiming at.

Q: In your article "On a Theory of 'Sources,'" you stated that "Hollywood is the monster-filter of capitalism through which is sifted American reality." How did you mean this in 1931 and what does it mean today?

A: The Workers Film and Photo League carried on the struggle on two fronts: (1) by making films aimed to bring the proletarian message of class struggle to the working class audiences and (2) to expose and combat the Hollywood lies that fill the American screens. During the early Fascist films we would boycott and picket. We occasionally went so far as to plant stink-bombs in the theater. And today Hollywood films still replace what ought to be, and has the potential to be, a highly progressive art. But there are so many books being published, so many films being made that the more escapist films you present to the people the less room there is for their creativity. And in that sense these Hollywood films are reactionary.

Q: So in that case all films are political.

A: That is precisely what I believe. Exactly. By displacing other films, and by intrinsically being what it is--pap, filler for so-called entertainment.

Q: In the same article you wrote that "Sociological implications can never be avoided, no matter how aesthetically disinterested either a novel, a play or a film may be." Could you elaborate on this briefly?

A: Indeed. I am not a disinterested art-for-art's-saker. The most "escapist" art is, by that very fact, sterile at best and reactionary at worst. This art abdicates the artist's responsibility to society and social progress. Daumier, Goya, Eisenstein, Balzac, Robeson, Hogarth, YES! De Kooning, Hollywood, Emshwiller, Anger, Kandinsky, Kline, NO! This is especially true in times of social and economic crises such as we are at present experiencing. What is art if it is not "engagé". . . and "enragé" too. Potamkin longed for the aesthetic of "negritude" . . . I wanted art at the service of black liberation.

Q: Also you wrote, "cinema needs more not less theory." When you wrote this it seems to me that the problem of theory and practice was resolved in a very natural way--from practice to theory, theory to practice. Could you elaborate?

A: You've read or heard the dictum that "theory without practice is sterile; practice without theory is blind." Theory has been defined as "congealed and encapsulated practice." Of all the arts, cinema is the youngest and most unexamined, only recently having been even

Pray for Work: Lower East Side

PHOTO: Leo Seltzer

considered worthy of serious study by art scholars and historians. A similar attitude towards the graphic arts would have arrested painting, say, at the level of the comic strip, poetry at the doggerel level, and music at the pop level. The Hollywood factories ground out their some eight hundred films a year with a blueprinted formula for mass consumption and profits. The devil take the hindmost in the problems of art and film theory. Profit and circuses were their only concerns. The very word "montage" was as foreign to these vulgar hucksters as some minor footnote in the Kabala. To us young progressive would-be filmmakers in the Workers Film and Photo League, the Soviet films and the writings of their makers were a welcome revelation guiding us through heretofore unknown territory to where we could learn the basic grammar of the medium, both in the making and the writing about films. For several years I wrote a column about films for the Daily Worker. The writings and creations of the Soviet directors provided invaluable in my evaluating and analyzing films both domestic and foreign. The bulk of the world's film production came out of Hollywood where the pragmatic box-office consideration was the sole guide to excellence and "art". Remember Goethe's deathbed yearning: "More light! More light!" That's what I meant when I wrote we need "more not less theory."

Q: Often a Marxist film will try to explain a historical situation and all the conditions which led to that situation. Do you see any recent attempts as this kind of cinema?

A: I think the Soviet films such as ALEXANDER NEVSKY, IVAN THE TERRIBLE, BALLAD OF A SOLDIER and SEEDS OF FREEDOM and many more such films have "explained" or at least have made a good try at explaining "historical situations." On the other hand, to be so rigid as to expect any film to hew to a close Marxist view is sometimes to look a gift horse in the mouth when we consider domestic independent products like HEARTS AND MINDS, for instance. Or some of the documentaries by Wiseman which powerfully expose a situation. A number of the so called "Third World" films also have this quality. In any case, that's a big order you're asking, and not easy to strictly define. Eisenstein told us that when Stalin saw a preview of ALEXANDER NEVSKY he turned to him and said: "Comrade Eisenstein, you're a Bolshevik!" What do you think, Tony?

Q: What do you think a political film can do? Whom should it reach? Godard used to speak of the "cinema as a gun." To what extent do you think a film can bring about social change?

A: What is a political film? Or, conversely, what isn't? I've already touched on this question in a previous reply. At this juncture of history, I think that films should be slanted to reach the widest spectrum of the population, including the disaffected sections of the middle class and intellectuals, but appealing most directly to the most decisive component of our capitalist society: the working class. I'm not quite clear as to what Godard means by "cinema as a gun" (after all, he's a Maoist and carries his barricades in his backpack). I'm afraid to take this too literally. We've hardly reached that stage, don't you think? If he's simply setting that up as a metaphor for the class struggle, well, that's another matter. No single medium, be it literature, painting, theatre or whatever can of itself bring about social change, of course. But in historical conditions ripe for such change, the film can certainly make a potent contribution in this regard, probably more so than other creative media.

Q: Why more so than any other media?

A: Because I think its effect is cumulative. We grow up with film as a culture, right? We see many films and this has a certain effect on us. The total effect, of course, orients your consciousness in a certain direction--it can be reactionary, it can be revolutionary, it can be innocuous--but it cannot be said that any single film can do anything like that. Although pivotal creations in art such as Uncle Tom's Cabin in this country, or Diderot's work in his day, or Rousseau, helped bring about a revolutionary situation, it wasn't just a single creation but so many others and, of course, the objective conditions which make for revolution and social change. So I think in the case of film it is the totality of what we see, but not a single film.

But in the case of the Russian films, it must be said, that intellectuals and artists in the 1930's who saw all of these great films couldn't possibly totally escape the content. They saw that here was a different technique, a different aesthetic, and at the same time, a revolutionary content. And that helped push them towards a more Marxist and revolutionary outlook on life in general. How can you separate the Russian Revolution from OCTOBER?

But still I think the cumulative effect of film still holds true. That is why in the 1930's with the Worker's Film and Photo League, we tried to do as many short films as possible, not just one epic-making production that really wouldn't accomplish anything.

Q: How would you describe the function of radical film criticism in the thirties and today? Is there a difference?

A: In the thirties movies were no more the "opium of the people" than they are today, or always have been for that matter (although I'm inclined to grant TV that dubious distinction in our time). The role of radical criticism therefore remains the same: a consistent and relentless analysis and exposure of that commercial establishment product that

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numbs the will and brain of the masses and contributes to concealing and sidetracking the thrust of the working class in the struggle against the danger of war, unemployment, racism, the problems of the aged, and cultural dissolution.

Q: Today, perhaps the greatest controversy in political filmmaking is whether a revolutionary form is needed to express a revolutionary content. To what extent was this a concern for you in your early Marxist film work?

A: Again we come back to the problem touched upon in a previous question: theory, form, content, etc. I firmly believe that for the left there can only be one viable form of filmmaking and that is the documentary form of "engaged" reality. This is true also in a practical, pragmatic sense. The split in the old Workers Film and Photo League in the thirties was the result of a principled disagreement as to whether we ought to continue doing short documentaries born in the heat of the class upheavals of the time or concentrate on enacted, recreated "features" produced over considerably longer spans of time--blockbuster productions, so to speak. The result was a split away from the Workers Film and Photo League and others who looked upon us as the great unwashed who could not be initiated into the more lofty realms of cinema art. Life itself provided the answers when this group finally exhausted its energies and resources in the production of films which, by the time they were finished, were obsolete in relation to current events. Even if one were to set aside all other objections to this policy, the exhausting and endless quest for funding such films drained the group of most of the creative drive and energy needed to create such long-range projects. The fallacy of such an approach would be immeasurably compounded today by the fact that films are not silent as they were then. Thus film technology and costs (plus the inflation factor!) have proliferated in almost geometric progression. The long, enacted or re-enacted form is therefore completely ruled out for our time.

I cannot agree that today "the greatest controversy in political filmmaking is whether a revolutionary form is needed to express a revolutionary content." If there is such a "controversy" then it is sterile, academic and unrealistic. Who today is making "political" or radical films responding to the needs of the hour? No Film and Photo League, no Frontier Films. The colleges throughout the nation are now graduating some 10,000 film and TV majors a year and what I've called "the rage to film" shows no sign of abating. I've seen them come in droves to Tom Brandon's showings of films we sweated out in the thirties, but I've learned that the main thrust of their interest is NOT in the social-political events of the period, but rather in the KIND of films we made then! An obsessive interest and curiosity in form and technique, but hardly in the earth shaking events. In the light of this central fact--and I hope I'm dead wrong in this estimate--it becomes patently pointless to indulge in fruitless exchanges involving problems of "revolutionary form and content." This inevitably becomes an easy substitute for organizing viable progressive filmmaking groups who in the very process of making films would provide the needed solutions--technical, aesthetic, political.

Q: Were you in this country during the investigations of The House Committee on Un-American Activities?

A: Yes, I was in the U.S. during the witch-hunts. I was one of its minor victims (kicked off the WPA for refusing to sign some obscene loyalty oath). It goes without saying that many of my friends and comrades were severely victimized by the HUAC; many of them lost their livelihood or had to leave the country.

Q: You indicated to me that you remain active in local Marxist media groups. Could you briefly discuss your present work and do you feel a continuity with your earlier work?

A: To the extent that my present poor health permits, I am desperatively trying to keep my left pinky in progressive film activity. It isn't easy. I've on a number of occasions managed to corral small groups of activists involved in filmmaking in one phase or another, but the insurmountable thing seems to be that young people have lost the instinct for collective work and organization which made it possible to scale mountains in the thirties. This is especially true in the corrupting centers of Hollywood where the pressure for careerism and selfish individual climbing overwhelms the young would-be filmmaker. And it must be remembered that the present-day costs of even the most modest film effort are staggering. Only a collective of dedicated and determined people can get anywhere, and even then the obstacles are colossal.

Yes, we need a new left film organization that would be tailored to the needs of our own time, with a "rage" not merely for film for its own sake, but to put this powerful medium at the service of progress and change. Why this has not yet happened even on an elementary scale is a puzzle to me. I tried with might and main to get a project started on the tragic problems of the aged poor in our society but so far have failed to stir up sufficient interest. I'm still trying, however. I'm also a member of the Socialist Media Group in Santa Monica and have lectured on films before meetings of the New American Movement.

Q: T.W. Adorno has asserted that the only choice of a politically committed artist at this point in history is to create a negative art. Do you agree in the context of the thirties and today?

A: I emphatically disagree with Adorno. What the hell is a negative art? Are dreck like TOWERING INFERNO, HINDENBURG, KING KONG, and JAWS "positive" then? Is POTEMKIN positive or negative art? And if "positive," what is the criticism? I find such pronouncements a mere juggling with words. What the "politically committed artist" owes the people at this juncture is revolutionary art dedicated to revolutionary transformations of society. Any other formulation is mere intellectual obfuscation. Are THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS, THE BATTLE OF LENINGRAD, and HEARTS AND MINDS positive or negative? You tell me, was Daumier a "negative" artist? Was Goya? Was Z negative or positive? I think the work we did in the thirties, crude and amateurish as were so many of our efforts, could hardly be characterized as "negative."

Q: On January 23 of this year you must have learned of an event that seriously grieved you--Paul Robeson's death. Did you ever have the opportunity to work with this great man?

A: The death of an American giant like Robeson, who was such a heroic and noble personality on the American scene for so many years, represents a tragic and overwhelming loss to all who loved him through the great social earthquakes of the 1930's and 1940's. I can't think of any one personality who even remotely approached his stature as an artist and spokesman for the black masses. I think it speaks well for you to bring up his name and to remember him. I met Paul Robeson only once at the Soviet Pavilion of the New York World's Fair of 1929 (I believe that was the year). His huge hand came near crushing mine in a warm handshake and I can still hear that thunderous laughter as others crowded around him for autographs and fraternal talk. ■

IV. Writings of Samuel Brody

Paris Hears Eisenstein

The following is Brody's enthusiastic account of Sergei Eisenstein's lecture, "principles of the New Russian Cinema," given at the Paris Sorbonne on February 17, 1930. It is reprinted here from the British film journal Close Up, (Vol. VI, No. 4, April 1930). --Tony Safford

--Samuel Brody

It was nine o'clock in the evening. In a small lecture hall at the Sorbonne University in Paris, nearly two thousand people are crowded together to witness a private showing of THE GENERAL LINE, and hear S. M. Eisenstein lecture on the "Principles of the New Russian Film." The occasion is given under the auspices of a group of austere academicians ponderously named, *Groupe d'Etudes Philosophiques et Scientifiques pour l'Examen des Tendances Nouvelles.*

The atmosphere is severe. Many learned men of France have been heard in this same room before. The problems of Intuition and Kantian Transcendentalism as well as other burning questions of the day have time and again been discussed here by copiously bewhiskered professors before bored young students of the University. In a few minutes our beloved Eisenstein will be sitting on this same platform. We have never seen him before, but POTEMKIN still lives in our minds and the tempered-steel quality of TEN DAYS has not been forgotten.

Eisenstein appears on the platform. The atmosphere of respectable behaviour is immediately broken as his wide smile announces a friend, a comrade. Loud applause. But he does not seem to like that and he motions to the audence to stop.

In the meantime, something has happened. Whispers in the audience. The chairman announces that the Parisian police has forbidden the showing of THE GENERAL LINE. Faintly he mutters a few words about ". . . hindering the spread of knowledge . . . shameful . . . liberty." No one is satisfied, and the audence starts a demonstration that lasts for fifteen minutes. Eisenstein seems to be pleased with all this. The prohibition of the film has been a powerful boomerang. No Russian film that I have seen has ever succeeded in arousing so much bitterness against the powers that be as was evident in the crowd that night.

The commotion subsides and the speaker is introduced. He does not "lecture" nor read from a prepared paper. His French is slightly tight, but his accent flawless and delivery fluent. The words he cannot remember he describes with characteristic gestures that everybody understands.

"I am sorry that you cannot see my film . . . . This makes my task much harder, as I will have to make up for what you cannot see with my limited French. When I am thru speaking you may throw questions at me and I will try to answer. A sort of friendly ping-pong game. But I beg you not to ask me the whereabouts of General Koutepov or what salary I earn in the USSR, for if you do I am certain that my replies will not satisfy you."

And thus, after he has won the confidence of everyone in the audience. Eisenstein proceeds to a broad outline of his subject. He begins by drawing a clear differentiation between the conception of the film in

the Soviet Union and in the capitalist countries. The destruction of the rotten dramatic trilogy and the raising of the film to an educational and cultural level, he says, was the first task of the Russian directors after the Revolution. He tells of the concrete problems which confront the Soviet movie in regard to the education and political enlightenment of the formerly oppressed national minorities; the establishment in Moscow and Leningrad of the first cinema universities in the world for the purpose of training permanent scientific and artistic cadres.

"We are working to draw broad masses into the production of our films. Criticisms of our work by the workers and peasants is most valuable to us. Indeed, only their needs and opinions are important, as we are working with and for them. They discuss the value of scenarios in their factory committees and are quite frequently very critical of our work. In the Soviet Union the director and his cameramen play a comparatively secondary role. They are only called in when the ideological importance of a certain theme for a film has been decided upon by those for whom the film is produced."

Eisenstein then gives a brief résumé of the Russian directors' achievements in the technical sphere of the movies.

"The importance of our method lies in the fact that we have discovered how to force the spectator to think in a certain direction. By mounting our films in a way scientifically calculated to create a given impression on an audience, we have developed a powerful weapon for the propagation of the ideas upon which our new social systems is based.

"We have discarded the professional actor for 'the man in the street'. We are convinced that this has brought us a step nearer to life. When we require an old man in a film, the actor who rehearses three days before he can play the part can never do it so well as a real old man who has been rehearsing for say—sixty years. This method has its difficulties, of course, but so far it has proven its advantages over the old way."

This does not all sound like music to many highly-paid movie actors in the audience, but in Eisenstein's case, "first came the deed," and those who have seen his films acted by real sailors, real workers and on authentic locales, are well convinced that the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Cinedialectic. The making of Marx's Capital into a film. The cinema of the future!

A lot has been said and written recently about Eisenstein's so-called "new principle of the film." Distorted translations of his articles and vague interpretations of his new theory have appeared in the press. The author now speaks for himself.

"My new conception of the film is based on the idea that the intellectual and emotional processes which so far have been conceived of as existing independently of each other—art versus science—and forming an antithesis heretofore never united, can be brought together to form a synthesis on the basis of *cinedialectic*, a process that only the cinema can achieve. A spectator can be made to *feel-and-think* what he sees on the screen. The scientific formula can be given the emotional quality of a poem. And whether my ideas on this matter are right or wrong, I am at present working in this direction. I will attempt to film Capital so that the humble worker or peasant can understand it."

Our scepticism means but little, for we are before a man who has succeeded in making people weep at the sight of a milk-separator in THE GENERAL LINE. Moreover, the organization of human feeling on the basis of a correct *understanding* of reality is nothing new to the Marxian. Incidentally, the famous French physiologist, Claude Bernard, had the same problem in mind when he said more than sixty years ago, "Can we speak of a peremptory contradiction between science and art, between sentiment and reason? I do not believe in the possibility of this contradiction."

Eisenstein is making a concrete approach to this problem which is obviously not an academic one. As he tells us, it was born out of the necessity to teach economics to workers and peasants.

"If we succeed, it will have been Russia's great contribution to the general history of the arts."

And in conclusion:

"Our cinema has developed in the midst of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Its birth and development cannot be dissociated from the great aim of our country, the building of Socialism!"

The lecture is over and Eisenstein calls for questions. Sound? Stereoscopy? Colour? The speaker is bombarded with questions from all sides. Some are bitter and unfriendly, but Eisenstein never weakens.

An actor shouts: "Will the speaker please tell me whether it is possible for an actor who is an individualist in his art and in his philosophy, to exist in the Soviet Union?"

Eisenstein: "Stay here young man, you will find Parisian soil much more fertile than ours!"

In answering questions on sound, the speaker again expounds what he and his co-workers had to say a few months ago in the official statement issued by them.

"Every fact optically perceived has its corresponding value in sound. As far as I know, only the Japanese Kabouki Theatre has employed sound-sight in this way. For example, while an actor is *seen* committing hari-haki on the stage, the tearing of silk is *heard* offstage. The Mickey Mouse sound cartoons have also come very close to this method. It is the only justification for sound in the movies. The present usage which establishes a naturalistic coincidence of image and sound is nonsense."

Eisenstein believes that in the near future the black-and-white film will disappear to be replaced by the colour film, of which, he says, he has seen some fine examples.

"There will remain only a few isolated enthusiasts who will crusade against the colour film in the name of the black-and-white principle."

He further emphasizes that none of the recent discoveries in the cinema, (colour, stereoscopy, wide film, etc.) will create revolutionary changes. He understands, above all, the commercial significance of all these innovations.

And so Eisenstein leaves us amidst a tremendous acclaim.

We have not seen THE GENERAL LINE, but two hours in presence of its genial creator have been ample compensation to us.

The greatest movie director in the Soviet Union is at present working in the Tobis Sound Studios at Epinay, near Paris, where he is experimenting with a German sound system. This in the midst of a conspiracy of silence on the part of the French movie press and an active boycott by the official cinema circles of Paris.

Out of over two hundred people present at a dinner tendered in honour of Eisenstein and his assistants by the Friends of the Soviet Union, not a single soul from the French movie world was present.

I cannot help agreeing with Leon Moussinac on this matter: "Jealousy and envy are one of the forms of the petty-bourgeois mind. Cowardice is a form of decadence." ■

The Revolutionary Film: Problem of Form

"The Revolutionary Film" is reprinted from New Theater, February 1934. Here Brody encapsulates the original stance of the Workers Film and Photo League and certainly that argument which tended to prevail in practice through the early thirties. From within the context of the documentary film, Brody distinguishes three types: (1) the simple newsreel or "the recording of highlights in the class struggle which are of political value", (2) following Vertov, the "synthetic documentary" dependent upon the art and craft of the editor for its effect, and (3) the educational short "for purposes of direct political-economic instruction." Aside from this, Brody finds all other film forms, such as the combination of documentary and recreated material, as reactionary deviations which, by leaving "the sensation of reality irremediably disrupted", become less of a political weapon.

In the following issue of New Theater, there appeared "The Revolutionary Film"--Next Step" by Leo T. Hurwitz. In a polite but significant way, Hurwitz challenged Brody's limiting position and argued instead for "a mixed form of the synthetic document and the dramatic" which would deepen the scope of the revolutionary film by recreating those "events and emotions not revealable to the camera" of the documentary. For Brody, "workers' films will be most art when they are most weapon." Hurwitz subtly reverses this by stressing a greater concern for training, craft, and "how to make the camera eloquent." This, of course, presupposes a semi-studio arrangement, scenarios, actors, and all the rest generally not common to the documentary format and opposed by Brody's conception of the revolutionary film.

Here in embryo are the beliefs which, a year later, caused the bitter split in the Film and Photo League and the eventual formation of Frontier Films. Hurwitz and Ralph Steiner were soon studying with Lee Strasberg who led them further away from the documentary and towards the totally enacted film, dependent upon the emotional involvement of the audence and depth of argument for its political power. For film theory and practice, this meant a shift away from Vertov (and thus Brody) and towards (the conceptualist) Eisenstein and especially (the humanist) Pudovkin. It is from this perspective that we ought to consider and evaluate Brody's "The Revolutionary Film." --Tony Safford

--Samuel Brody

The question: What is the medium of revolutionary film production in capitalist countries such as America? The answer: First and foremost the filmed document. Movie reportage. Reality recorded on film strips and subjected to the painstaking technical operations, montage, whereby these strips are built up into wholes embodying our revolutionary interpretation of events. This is neither a makeshift nor a degradation of the creative potentialities of the cinema. The bourgeois film has vulgarized and perverted the greatest faculty of the movie, never having raised it above the level of the newsreel.

Are we for the documentary simply because the studio-acted film is beyond our material reach? No. Strange as it may seem our orientation in this question is one of principle based on what we think is the most convincing and effective medium for "the camera in the class struggle." It is true that the method of the revolutionary filmed document will lead us miles away from the forms and requirements of the enacted studio film. This may cause many to shed a tear. It is, in fact, already causing tears. Our answer? We are forging the film into a working class weapon. And workers' films will be most art when they are most weapon.

In the film there exists no "happy medium" between the histrionic recreation of reality and directly recorded reality itself. "The illusion of reality in the cinema," writes Leon Moussinac, "must remain constant, even in the domain of the fantastic. In other words, in the cinema the sensation of reality is indispensable to emotion." Associate filmed reality and its reconstructed counterpart into a unified structure and you find "the sensation of reality" irremediably disrupted.

We are practical people. Our theories are acquired at the cost of badly burned fingers. Exhibit A: The Struggle for Bread.

We have, on the other hand, long ago discovered and tested the power and effect of simple and direct visual reporting.

Our records of the Detroit Ford Massacre, the Scottsboro Case, the Bonus March, etc., are ample proof that even when we abstain from "constructively editing" our photographed documents, they nevertheless retain an inestimable importance if for no other reason than that they are irrefutably convincing exposes. The Pathe Newsreel of the Ambridge massacre is a supreme example of the political value to us of motion picture reportage. We must train working class camera-men whose function in the workers' film movement will correspond to that of worker-correspondents in the field of revolutionary journalism.

We have as yet accomplished little in the sphere of the documentary film in which it is essential for us to intervene; to organize the raw material into a unified revolutionary interpretation. This represents an almost totally unexplored form calling for the highest degree of skill and talent in the realm of cinematic creation. Our best teachers in this respect are the Soviet directors of the documentary school who have tremendously enriched the arsenal of revolutionary film culture with such masterpieces as SHANGAI DOCUMENT, SPRING, etc. Our own WASHINGTON HUNGER MARCH and the sparklingly brilliant strip on the Washington Farmers Convention represent significant attempts in what must become the broad pattern for the production of films in the American working class film movement.

The resolution of the first conference of the Cinema Bureau of the International Union of Revolutionary Theatre suggests the didactic short film as an important form of our production. Match the moving diagram, chart or graph for workers study groups, if you can. We have completely neglected the educational short. We must build up a 16mm film library which will comprise a complete course in political education for workers. A joint task for the Film and Photo League and the faculty of the Workers School. In this connection we can avail ourselves of the mass of data and research compiled by departments of visual instruction in various institutions of bourgeois learning. Important scientific discoveries on methods of education through the moving image have been made during the last few years. These we must dig out of the specialized spheres of college laboratories where they are doomed to remain by virtue of their narrow and exclusive application (does Hollywood need them:) and use them for our purpose. Three distinct branches of the documentary method, therefore, comprise the scope of our production. Film reporting, or the recording of highlights in the class struggle which are of political value as events overflowing the frame which merely acts as the carrier, Ambridge, Scottsboro, Detroit Massacre, Tom Mooney Run, etc. The synthetic documentary, the effect and intent of which is one hundred percent dependent on the intervention of the "editor", The Land of The Free, Imperial Valley, etc. The frankly educational film for purposes of direct political-economic instruction.

The Film and Photo League is beginning to assume a status more commensurate with its great cultural-political importance in the struggles of the working class.

The Hollywood machine is being geared to the political and economic policies of its Wall Street owners. The production of reactionary, openly pro-war films is no longer the exception but the rule. The League's program of struggle against Hollywood is clear. We have already tested this program in action. There exist among us no political differences concerning methods of agitation and propaganda to be employed in struggling against the films of the enemies of the working class. ■

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VI. FILMOGRAPHY

--compiled by Russell Campbell and William Alexander

The great bulk of FPL footage, together with records of its content, was lost in a 1935 storage fire. Films known to have survived are so identified. No FPL films (with the sole exception of HALSTED STREET) are currently in distribution, or available for study, but the extant footage is being reconstituted by Tom Brandon and Leo Seltzer and will be released by a non-profit corporation, it is hoped, later in 1977.

The following list has been compiled mostly from scattered newspaper and periodical references, and is far from definitive. Any corrections or additions readers can supply would be most welcome.

Unless otherwise noted, the films are in 35mm, black-and-white, and silent, and may be assumed to be one reel (15 min. at silent speed) or less in length. Dates cited are those of first known exhibition. Production credits are given where they are known.

Annotating the newsreel footage presents special problems. Particular reels might be referred to by a variety of titles, or by none at all. Footage--such as that of the hunger marches--could be exhibited in various shifting combinations, subjected to recutting, cannibalized for later productions. In general, we have listed newsreel subjects as individual films where the nature of the material or the prominence of references to the footage seems to justify it. Occasionally a title has been supplied.

Some New York FPL newsreels were grouped together and exhibited, sometimes with significant commercial newsreel footage, under the series head America Today. No. 3 in this series was announced as being completed in September, 1934, but the total number produced is not known. The extant film with the title AMERICA TODAY is an aggregation of footage shot between 1932 and 1934 and was possibly not exhibited in this form in the Thirties.

A. NEW YORK

1930

MAY DAY EVENTS (May): Newsreel of the New York May 1st parade and demonstration.

Other Newsreel Subjects: (a) March 6th unemployment demonstration leaders William Z. Foster, Harry Raymond, Robert Minor and Israel Amter in jail (September), (b) Other CP-led demonstrations (September), (c) Activities at the W.I.R. children's camp (October), (d) Raid on the W.I.R. camp at Van Etten, N.Y. (October).

1931

ALBANY HUNGER MARCH (April): Documentation of the Hunger March to the New York State Legislature.

MAY DAY IN NEW YORK (May): Ph: Irving Lerner, Ralph Steiner. Newsreel of the May Day celebration.

NATIONAL HUNGER MARCH / HUNGER MARCH 1931 / HUNGER 1931 (December): Approx. 2 reels. Some footage survives. Documentary of the first National Hunger March to Washington, D.C., including police attacks.

PASSAIC STRIKE, 1927: Compilation of footage obtained of the Passaic, N.J., textile workers' strike.

A SHORT TRIP TO THE SOVIET UNION: No information available.

W.I.R. CHILDREN'S CAMP, N.Y.: Newsreel (?).

WORKERS NEWS, 1931: Newsreel.

THE NEW WORLD: 2 reels. Documentary on the history of workers' Russia, 1914-1931.

1932

THE STRIKE AGAINST STARVATION (January): Ph: Joseph Houdyna, Tom Brandon. 3 reels. Footage of the 1931 miners' strike, led by the N.M.U., in Pennsylvania, Ohio, W. Virginia and Kentucky.

KENTUCKY-TENNESSEE 1932 (April): Newsreel of the miners' strike.

MAY DAY DEMONSTRATION (May): Newsreel of the New York May 1st demonstration.

MAY DAY SCENES (May): Newsreel of May Day events throughout the U,S.

SCOTTSBORO DEMONSTRATION (May): Newsreel probably of the May 7th Harlem demonstration in support of the Scottsboro boys.

WORKERS EX-SERVICEMEN'S BONUS DEMONSTRATION / WORKERS EX-SERVICEMEN'S BONUS PARADE (June): Newsreel probably of the New York Bonus Army contingent marshalling for Washington departure (later incorporated in BONUS MARCH).

FOSTER AND FORD IN ACTION (July): Newsreel of the CP presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

BONUS MARCH / THE FIGHT FOR THE BONUS (October): Ph: Leo Seltzer; ed/Leo Seltzer, Lester Balog. 2 reels. Extant. Documentary of the national Bonus March, Washington encampment, and eviction of the marchers by police and Army.

RENT STRIKES (Spring?): Newsreel; no other information available.

NEW YORK'S HOOVERVILLES: No information available.

Other Newsreel Subjects: (a) Bonus Army scenes (later incorporated in BONUS MARCH) (June-July), (b) Anti-war demonstration (August), (c) Miners' strike (September), (d) Farmers' holiday (September), (e) T.U.U.L. picnic (September), (f) Washington, D.C. Scottsboro demonstration (Incorporated in the extant AMERICA TODAY) (November), (g) National Hunger March scenes (later incorporated in HUNGER) (December)

1933

HUNGER / HUNGER 1932 (January): Ph: Leo Seltzer, Leo T. Hurwitz, Robert Del Duca, Sam Brody, C.O. Nelson, William Kruck, Irving Lerner, Alfredo Valente; Ed: Leo T. Hurwitz, Robert Del Duca, Leo Seltzer, Norman Warren. 4 reels. Some footage survives. Documentary of the second National Hunger March to Washington, D.C., including introductory footage of life of the unemployed.

TOM MOONEY DEMONSTRATION (February): Newsreel.

UNEMPLOYED DEMONSTRATION (March): Newsreel, "showing delegations from Boro Park, Staten Island, Bronx, Pioneers, etc."

MAY DAY CELEBRATION / MAY DAY DEMONSTRATION / MAY DAY 1933 (May): Newsreel of the New York May Day events.

Other Newsreel Subjects: (a) Farmers' Conference (held Washington, D.C., December 7-10, 1932, by the United Farmers' League), (b) Lenin Memorial at the Coliseum, (c) Gibson Committee Protest, (d) Anti-Jim-Crow Demonstration, (e) Anti-war demonstration in Wall St. (These five items issued as one of the America Today series, February).

1934

TAXI STRIKE (May): Newsreel coverage of the New York taxi drivers' strike, February-April.

MAY DAY 1934 (May): Newsreel of the New York May Day parade and demonstration, including aerial shots.

PORTRAIT OF AMERICA (September): Compilation film edited from commercial newsreel clips.

MARINE / MARINE STRIKE / MARINE WORKERS / WATERFRONT / WORKERS ON THE WATERFRONT (December): D: Edward Kern (see Seltzer interview); Ph: Leo Seltzer. Approx. 15 min. 16mm. Documentary on the life of New York longshoremen.

WORLD IN REVIEW: Compilation film, including scenes of Hitler and Mussolini, probably edited from commercial newsreel footage.

Other Newsreel Subjects: (a) "Anti-fascist struggles," probably including united front demonstration outside the Austrian Consulate (May), (b) "Negroes and whites fight for democratic rights" (May), (c) Soviet freighter Kim in New York (May), (d) Scottsboro trial, including courtroom scenes (May), (e) Striking middle-western farmers (May), (f) "Clarence Hathaway (editor of Daily Worker) outside Madison Square Garden after having been assaulted" (May).

1935

1934 (March?): No information available.

EAST SIDE, WEST SIDE (March?): Documentary contrasting life in New York on opposite sides of Fifth Avenue.

H.R. 2827 (April): Ed: A. Tish. 3 reels, Documentary on the Unemployment and Social Insurance Congress held to press for passage of the Workers Unemployment, Old Age and Social Insurance Bill.

MAY DAY 1935 (May): Partly (200 ft.) in color. Newsreel on the united front May Day demonstrations around the country.

TAXI (May): D: Nancy Naumburg, James Guy. Approx. 80 min. 16mm (?). Dramatized documentary on the life and struggles of taxi drivers, based on the 1934 strike and acted by members of the Taxicab Drivers Union and the Theatre Union Studio.

UNITED FRONT (May?): Ed: Edward Kern. "Documented short on the recent Madison Square demonstration against fascist legislation."

HOLLYWOOD (Spring?): D: Vic Kandel, Robert Del Duca. 2 reels. Dramatized satire on Hollywood.

HANDS OFF ETHIOPIA (November): Compilation of war footage from commercial newsreel sources (?).

1936

GETTING YOUR MONEY'S WORTH (April?): D + SC: Julian Roffman; ph, ed: Julian Roffman, Vic Kandel, Robert Del Duca; supervised by Arthur Kallet for Consumers Union. 1 reel. Sound. Documentary on Consumers Union research lab testing milk, shoes, and lead toys. First in a series of consumers' films (others produced by Roffman, Kandel and Del Duca as the unit Contemporary Films, Inc.).

THE BIRTH OF NEW CHINA (May): Ed: Julian Roffman. 6 reels. Documentary on the Chinese Revolution from 1924 to 1935, edited from suppressed and other newsreels.

Extant Assemblage

AMERICA TODAY: Ph: (FPL footage) Leo Seltzer; ed (part): Leo Seltzer.

Composed of the following (dates of filming given):

A. FPL footage
   1) Hans Weidemann (Nazi emissary) protest (May 25, 1933)
   2) Washington, D.C. Scottsboro demonstration (November 7, 1932)

B. Commercial newsreel footage
   3) Fascist parades and Nazi activities in Italy and Germany (montage of F.D. Roosevelt included here in one version)
   4) March of workers in united front anti-fascist demonstration and political strike, Paris (February 12, 1934)
   5) Attack of deputies on steel strike pickets, Ambridge, Pa. (October 4, 1933)
   6) Interception of scab milk shipments by striking Wisconsin dairy farmers (probably summer 1932 or May 1933).

Independent Films Made in Association with the New York FPL

THE SCOTTSBORO BOYS (May, 1934: P: International Labor Defense, in association with NY FPL; d: Leo T. Hurwitz; ph: Lewis Jacobs, Leo Seltzer, Leo T. Hurwitz; ed: Leo T. Hurwitz. Documentary account of the Scottsboro case, including the 1933 Decatur trial.

SWEET LAND OF LIBERTY (July, 1934): P: Political Prisoners Committee of International Labor Defense, in association with NY FPL; d: Leo T. Hurwitz; ed: Leo T. Hurwitz. Ironically edited film on the harassment of dissenters.

SHERIFFED (September, 1934): P: Nancy Naumburg, James Guy, in association with NY FPL; d: Nancy Naumburg, James Guy; ph: Nancy Naumburg; cast: Lew Bentzley (organizer), Mr. and Mrs. John Cummings and their four children, members of the United Farmers Protective Association. Approx. 40 min. 16mm. Dramatized documentary, filmed in Pennsylvania, on the struggle of farmers against mortgage foreclosures.

ERNST THAELMANN: FIGHTER AGAINST FASCISM / ERNST THAELMANN: FIGHTER FOR FREEDOM (September, 1934): P: Thaelmann Liberation Committee, in association with NY FPL; dist: Garrison Films. 4 reels. Sound. Documentary on the political life, 1924-33, of the German Communist leader, compiled from smuggled newsreel footage, and with introduction and closing remarks by Earl Browder. Includes scenes of the burning of the books, the Reichstag fire, Dimitroff speaking in court, Dimitroff in Moscow, and episodes in the world-wide struggle to liberate Thaelmann.

HARLEM SKETCHES (April, 1935): P: Vanguard Films, in association with NY FPL; d: Leslie Bain; prod asst: Samuel Brody; mus: George Antheil. 2 reels. Sound. Documentary of miserable living conditions in Harlem, together with scenes of demonstrations and of Communist organizer James W. Ford in action.

Unfinished Films

WINTER 1931 (1931-32): Sc: Whittaker Chambers, Robert W. Dunn, Hugo Gellert, Joe North, Robert Evans, H.A. Potamkin. Projected film designed to portray the struggles of the workers and poor farmers against the miserable working conditions in the third winter of the economic crisis.

CHILD MISERY / MISERY AMONG WORKING CLASS CHILDREN (1933-34): Documentary undertaken to support the WIR relief campaign, on "the misery and degradation of proletarian children under capitalism in general and the economic crisis in particular."

UNEMPLOYMENT COUNCIL (1933-34): D + SC: Michael Gold. Dramatized documentary to have been made for the Unemployed Council on the lot of an unemployed family on New York's East Side.

WASTE AND WANT (1934): D: Sam Brody. Documentary project undertaken by the New York FPL's Harry Alan Potamkin Film School, as a student workshop under instructor Brody.

CIGARETTE (1934-35): Sc: Nathan Asch, David Platt. Projected 1-reel dramatized film.

B. DETROIT

1932

THE FORD MASSACRE / DETROIT FORD MASSACRE: Ph: Joseph Houdyna et. al. 1 reel. Extant. Newsreel of the March 7th Detroit/Dearborn demonstration and hunger march of unemployed Ford workers, showing the attack by police; funeral of the four workers killed; and subsequent protest picketing.

1935

SPEEDUP IN AUTO INDUSTRY Consultant: A.B. Magil. Documentary to have been made with assistance from the John Reed Club and Theatre of Action. Probably not completed.

WORKERS HEALTH Consultant: Dr. Bicknell Documentary to have been made with assistance from the John Reed Club and Theatre of Action, to be "partly enacted." It is not known if this project was completed.

C. CHICAGO

1931

HALSTED STREET: D, SC, ph, ed: C.O. Nelson. 1 reel. Documentary portraying the various ethnic groups along Chicago's Halsted Street. Archive print in the Collection of the Film Center, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

1932

COMMUNIST CONVENTION IN CHICAGO (June): Newsreel of the CP Convention, held in Chicago, May 28-30.

1934

THE GREAT DEPRESSION: D & Sc: Maurice Bailen; ph: John Freitag; ed: Maurice Bailen; cast: Jacques Jacobsen (man in the street), Nettie (prostitute). 1 reel. Extant. A documentary of hard times, including footage of united protest actions involving Heywood Broun, Norman Thomas, Lucy Parsons, Mother Ella Bloor, and John L. Spivak.

WORLD'S FAIR (Fall): No information available.

1935

CRIMINAL SYNDICALIST LAW ON TRIAL (February): Documentary on the Hillsboro case.

The Chicago FPL was also responsible for several newsreels not mentioned above whose content is not known. In January 1935 a project was announced for a film which would expose the real state of affairs among Chicago's unemployed, through consultation with doctors and child health specialists. The film was not completed.

D. LOS ANGELES

1932

IMPERIAL VALLEY: "Synthetic" documentary of labor conditions in the agricultural "hell hole" of California. (Note: This film was advertised as being shown in New York in November, 1932. Another FPL film of this title was advertised as being given its "first public showing" in New York in April 1936; it is possible that the later film--if it is indeed distinct--is a revised version of the earlier one. To add to the confusion, *Experimental Cinema* editor Seymour Stern was commissioned by the WIR to make a film on Imperial Valley in 1933; Stern's film was not completed.)

1933

COTTON-PICKERS STRIKE (Summer): Newsreel.

SAN DIEGO POLICE ATTACK ON WORKERS: Newsreel of an anti-war demonstration subsequently used in court to obtain acquittal for the defendants.

1934

BLOOD MEMORIAL DAY (June?): Newsreel of the police terror in Los Angeles, Memorial Day 1934. Used in court by a group of workers arrested for "inciting to riot."

CALIFORNIA 1934 (Summer): No information available.

CANNON FODDER: Compilation film edited from newsreel footage of various world armies.

LIVING WAGE OR DEATH: Dramatized documentary about the calling of a strike.

TOM MOONEY: Documentary on the case and the campaign to free Mooney (?).

Other Newsreel Subjects: (a) El Monte berry pickers' strike (January); (b) Los Angeles County Hunger March demonstrations (January). ■

UNION MAIDS

WORKING CLASS HEROINES

--Linda Gordon

UNION MAIDS is an important, compelling, and happy new film, product of a new class conscious socialist movement that is emerging out of the strengths of both the New and Old Lefts.[1] The film, if it is as widely used as I hope it will be, should also help to build that movement by making it possible to understand and use our history.

UNION MAIDS is thus a film about working-class history made to become part of the working-class future. It is carefully researched (although it contains some misleading implications which I will discuss below) and it is easy and accessible. It is about the emotional and personal as well as the objective and political reality of its heroines. UNION MAIDS is a film about heroics, and therefore in the optimistic tradition of socialist realism; it reasserts the potential of leadership by people who are at once exceptional and ordinary.

The film, a collective portrait of three women labor organizers active from the 1930's to the present, focuses on the CIO organizing drive of the 1930's. The three women were part of a community of working class Chicago socialists. They all came to Chicago in their youth, two from farms and one from New Orleans; all entered industrial jobs in the early 1930's and rapidly became rank-and-file activists, union organizers, and socialist leaders.

Their stories first appeared, told by themselves, in Alice and Staughton Lynd's recent book, Rank and File: Personal Histories of Working Class Organizers, thus it is possible to find out even more about them than the movie tells us. In content as well as in conceptualization the movie is in some ways a cinematization of the book, and this is no slight to the film. Rather, it suggests the importance of the kind of class conscious, political, oral history that the Lynds are doing.

I am writing about this film mainly as an historian. I bring in "extraneous" information, from the Lynds' book and from other sources, because I want to evaluate the film as a form of communication of historical and political understandings. Many of my comments are more questions than criticisms, for being neither filmmaker nor film critic, I am unsure of the possibilities of filmic communication. I am stimulated to offer these comments because I liked the film very much, and hope that its showing will often be combined with discussions in which its political implications can be evaluated.

Sylvia Woods was born in New Orleans in 1909, black, daughter of a craftsman roofer, a man proud of his skill. She is conscious of the political legacy given her by her father, who was an ardent union man and a Garveyite; as a schoolgirl she was already fighting racism and refusing to accept the accommodationist ideology her school offered. Stella Nowicki also sees herself mostly as her father's daughter. She grew up on a midwestern farm, leaving there in 1933 at age 17. Her father had been a coal miner, a socialist who read Lenin and Gorky in Polish, while her mother was a practicing Catholic. Stella learned Polish from her father's revolutionary books, yet she also had to struggle against her father's patriarchal control. Kate Hyndman is the only one of the "union maids" who speaks in the film of her debt to her female ancestors' rebelliousness and toughness. (Since in the Lynds' book she too speaks mainly of what she learned from her father and how she struggled against him, one wonders whose decision it was, or whether it was merely chance, that she speaks of the women in her family in the film. This is one of several instances when the viewer senses that the filmmakers are not entirely in control of what their film says.) Hyndman immigrated to Iowa from Croatia at age five, in 1913. Her father was also a coal miner.

Visually we meet these women only through contemporary interviews. We never see them at their work--neither factory work nor organizing. These are not famous or rich people, and there are no old newsreels of them, only a few old snapshots. The viewer imagines them as young women in the 1930's by drawing on their current liveliness and vitality as they describe their past work. Those who already know some of this history can add to the film mentally; enthusiastically participating in the historical reconstruction.

That the film works so well and is so gripping even to those who are not familiar with this history is, I think, largely due to Julia Reichert and James Klein's wonderful editing and use of old still and documentary photography. On second viewing it is surprising to realize that this energetic movie is composed only of interviews edited together with historical images. We see what Chicago looked like in the Depression; we see mass strikes, sit-downs, demonstrations, eviction resistance, class violence. The force of the class struggle of the 1930's is shown, not just told. One feels inside this energy, and the music is important to this. Taj Mahal, the Pointer sisters, Howie Tarnower, Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers, help set the mood and pace of the film.

But the specific political content of the film, the history that it teaches, is not precise as its more general communication of mood. I found myself wishing for more explicitness in many areas, especially considering how few of the film's viewers can be expected to know working class history (given the deliberate suppression of that history in our education).

The film is about a period of great working class power. The three organizers reveal nostalgia for the feeling of that power. Sylvia Woods describes how in the laundry where she first worked (it was only rarely that black women could get industrial jobs at that time), the workers conducted what she believes may have been the first sit-down strike of the Depression era. She is proud of those women, full of respect for their, and her own militancy and bravery. Stella Nowicki's face is luminous with delight when she describes how often the packinghouse workers would stop the line, shutting down production. There is an important lesson here: when workers, for a change, feel powerful, it is fun--even elating. This emotion is a large part of what makes people militant and gives them confidence in their own and other people's power to make radical social changes.

Yet this respect for the reality of working class power in the industrial cities of the 1930's contains a misconception of women's reality. The film's whole conception--the story of three women CIO organizers--denies the larger reality, which is that the CIO did very little for women. Most women did not then and still don't work in heavy industry; the CIO's efforts to organize the large numbers of women in clerical and service work were puny. The exceptions came as a result of bottom-up pressure, rank-and-file local organizing drives, like the early actions in Sylvia Woods laundry, which virtually forced the CIO to respond. The unions did not initiate significant drives to organize women's employment sectors. Furthermore, most employed women did not work in mass employment situations at all. Until 1940 the largest job category for women was domestic service! Domestic and personal service workers represented 29% of the female labor force. Thus, partly owing to the sexism of the CIO, partly to the structural sexism of the labor market and the family, the women who, like the "union maids," were involved in the great working class rising of the 1930's were exceptions. To miss this basic fact would be not only to misunderstand history but potentially also to mistake some of the problems of organizing women today.

These qualifications do not lessen the legitimacy of choosing the "union maids" as the topic for a film. Their very strengths and achievements show what women can do. But even a brief piece of narrative in the film, spoken or written, could have placed the three women in a better historical context.

The views that the "union maids" had in the 1930's about women, expressed sensitive understanding of women's special problems. Sylvia Woods tells a moving anecdote about encouraging women to resist employers' efforts to intimidate them about absenteeism by refusing to give specific reasons on the form supplied for that purpose; they all just wrote in "tired" as their reason for absence.

Kate Hyndman tells how when she was a CIO staff organizer the men all ate lunch without her, and her union boss complained that it was inappropriate for her to eat with the staff stenographers! Yet all three women are insistent on the necessity of working with men, struggling with them, and educating them, though understanding that this means double work and double struggle for the women.

Kate's personal sense of her womanness, symbolic perhaps of the whole generation, comes through in a story she tells us about her farm grandmother: the first morning after her wedding night, the whole extended farm household assembled, expecting her to serve them breakfast as was customary. She announced that she would not be their servant and would not wait on them; instead she would work in the fields and challenged any man to do more than she. The women were to be super-women. They were to prove their merit by being better than the men. This was not an unusual attitude; it was characteristic not only of women in the Left but of a large part of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminist movement. And yet we must be critical of this; it not only avoids a direct attack on male supremacy, it is not an effective strategy for organizing women. After all, it's not much of an appeal to say, join us so you can work twice as hard.

Could the film have found some way to offer a critical view of this, to contrast it with other possible feminist strategies? Could the film at least have pointed out that though there were many precedents for autonomous women's labor organizations before the 1930's, they were not seriously considered by any of the radicals of the 1930's?

The film's confrontations with racism are equally tentative and limited, merely reporting the problems and analyses of the organizers. The three women seem to understand the fact of black vanguardism: that black workers were the most militant and led the others. They all struggled with the racism of white workers as well as that of the capitalist system. They are also unwavering in their certainty that interracial class unity is essential to a strong workers' movement and that integrated organization is the only way to get it. Indeed, black Sylvia Woods, in her warm, personal but very didactic style, chooses to tell us about overcoming her own racism! That is, she says that at first her loyalty and her political commitment were exclusively to black workers and that she slowly learned that there were whites who she could trust to fight for racial justice.

This story no doubt reflects the positive experience of many black radicals of the period, but it is hardly more common than the experience of betrayal by whites. And looking back on the 1930's today, we experience a certain sadness that the interracial unity fought for by these radicals did not predominate, and that racism continues as a powerful, perhaps the most powerful, disunifying force within the working class. Could the film have put the optimism of the 1930's on this question into some perspective? Without that perspective one wonders if that historical optimism is not made to seem unconvincing and naive.

I am a bit disturbed by the reportage-like stance of the film, its backing off from interpretation. There is too little narrative, too little historical context, too little comment from the 1970's. It would not diminish the contribution and acumen of the three heroines to suggest that their historical era was different, that forty years later we could learn from their mistakes as well as from their victories.

The film's documentary stance is perhaps most disturbing on the question of leadership and socialist organization within the CIO. I think that all three women were members of the Communist Party. However, the film masks their Party membership. The three women speak of themselves as "radicals," not socialists or communists, and say nothing about their organizational connections. Stella Nowicki refers in the film to "Herb," whom we know from the book to be a CP activist, but in the film he is entirely unidentified. Having had Communist Party parents myself, I suspect that the reticence may be the preference of the women themselves, the caution resulting from years of persecution, and the filmmakers may have been powerless to change their minds. Their discretion is understandable, but it is a mistake. It is a mistake first, because when the issue does come up, as when Kate Hyndman is denounced as a Red in the 1940's, she is in a defensive position. Thus, the film viewer sees being a communist, as an accusation of wrong-doing before we have encountered it as a strength and a source of pride. Furthermore, this avoidance potentially confirms wide-

spread fears and stereotypes of communists as habitually devious and manipulative. By contrast, the personal qualities of Woods, Nowicki, and Hyndman would have made it possible for the film to show that it was a good thing to be a communist in the 1930's.

Second, failure to discuss the discipline, support, comradeship, and strategic consulation these women got from their Party comrades suggests that somehow they became effective leaders magically, through their innate individual talents. One response to that kind of understanding would be politically pessimistic, to think, "I could never be like them." The truth is that good leadership is created by a combination of individual qualities, learned skills, and connective organization and support. Furthermore, the relationship between leaders and the rank-and-file is mystified by the lack of clarity about the role of the Communist Party. For example, Sylvia Wood criticizes the CIO leadership for failing to lead, for remaining behind the understanding and demands of the masses of workers. Yet given her overall evaluation of the CIO--its bureaucratism, sexism, conservatism--this criticism makes no sense without the additional information that there were organizations of socialists that could have educated and challenged workers to a more radical understanding of what could be done.

Again, I am not sure how the film could have been otherwise, given what I suspect might have been the women's reluctance to discuss their CP affiliations. Yet even had there been no way of confronting the CP issue, there could have been a clearer sense of the collective nature of the leadership these "union maids" offered.

One of the strengths of the film is the great attractiveness of the three women. They are so witty, happy, energetic and handsome; I would like to hang out with them. At the very end of the film there is a still picture, posed, of the three together? Reminiscing about their work, the countless meetings they must have gone to, their experiences of sharing personal and public problems, with others if not with each other? Conversation between the three might have brought out more hindsight observations and criticisms, lessening the burden of the narration to provide this. Here too there may have been reticence to overcome, not only about past politics but also about the relevance of "personal life." One of the three women

points out that most women activists were unmarried, and clearly she views this fact as socially significant (a 1970's feminist thinks immediately of women's labor in the family and men's exploitation of women as factors that prevent women's political activity), but she does not wish to elaborate. Apparently she does not view these problems as political issues. Choosing not to comment, the film again limits us to seeing the story through three individual narratives.

Despite their existence in the film as separate individuals, the women do not seem isolated. This is largely because of the skill with which filmmakers Reichert, Klein, and Miles Mogulescu put together sounds and images of the collective force of the CIO drive. Yet beyond this, the very attractiveness, magnetism and dignity of Kate Hyndman, Stella Nowicki, and Sylvia Woods show that their lives have been lived in an intensely social manner. Ultimately the film is theirs, and they are its strength. The film lets us see them, and the view is clear due to the filmmakers' craft. It would be wonderful if UNION MAIDS marked only the beginning of the use of film to let us learn from the activists of an earlier period. If we rely on historians to build this communication, or even on the written work of our now scanty movement press, we will lose too much.

1. I am indebted to Rosalyn Baxendall, Peter Biskind, Nancy Falk, Allen Hunter, and Ann Popkin for helpful comments and ideas. ■

THE BAD NEWS BEARS

PARABLES IN A BALLPARK

--Gerald Peary

"Sports, particularly on a local level, . . . serve as vehicles for creativity, self-expression, and cultural growth for oppressed people. In working-class and poor neighborhoods throughout America, both black and white, participation in sports (as distinct from viewing) serve as a highly affirmative experience which can define communities, express personalities, and help people endure the pains of daily life." (Mark Naison, "Sports and the American Empire," Radical America, July-August 1972.)

It's the Jewish-American Dream gone helter-skelter. After forty years of escaping the desert, there is Wandering Walter Matthau, a wrinkled and bulbous potato, slow burning in the Southern California sun. He's back in arid exile, in Ronald Reagan country, cleaning out swimming pools for the blonde and beautiful newly rich. His own eyelids barely crack open in the heat and boredom, his eyes stare unfeelingly, his mouth drones bad thoughts and swigs beer. If W.C. Fields had a secretly semitic cousin, this is he.

In his heyday this boozy mess of a man, Buttermaker alias Boilermaker, was supposed to have been a ballplayer, though never a great ballplayer--no Sandy Koufax, with a kosher left curve and marriage to Richard Widmark's daughter, no Hank Greenberg, fifty-eight home runs in a single season and bonafide Hall of Fame. Instead, Buttermaker languished in the minor leagues, growing grizzled and over-the-hill, uttering wry acerbic comments from his proper place on the bench.

Is there a chance for a dry, dugout comic such as this, away from employ in the Catskills? Seriously, ladies and gentlemen, Little League builds sound character, even in those too old and gone to play. Inexplicably, Buttermaker finds himself signed on as manager of a pick-up, fall-down team of tiny tots, runts of the Litter League, as motley and hapless a bunch as ever took the field--and the very mirror image of Buttermaker's own cracked, convulsed melting pot soul. The fat kid is obviously the catcher, but everyone else is a utility rightfielder. It's the seventeenth team in a sixteen-team league. The opponents are endowed with correct names, like the Yankees and Athletics. But this expansion team is labeled with the terribly unbaseball-like appellative of The Bears.

The Michael Ritchie movie, however, is called potently THE BAD NEWS BEARS. And how Matthau turns his vagabond band into a team of little league (temporary) winners, with pride in themselves and guts, is the predictable story--as is the concomitant "comeback" of Buttermaker. The movie is all so easy to do and yet so deeply appreciated by audiences thirsting for a bring-the-whole-family evening in this 1970's famine of old-time bijou entertainment.

Not that THE BAD NEWS BEARS is a throwback to late Disney studio treacle. Ritchie's picture is a children's version of THE LONGEST YARD (in places, such as the ritualized recruitment of the "bad" element to the team, a direct steal from the 1974 super hit), and it includes for youngsters heaps of dirty LONGEST YARD language and the swift kicks to the balls. Still scriptwriter Bill Lancaster (son of actor Burt) avoids the forced and stale bathroom jokes, the "Bullshit!" at every turn, which plagues the Mel Brooks movies. He writes dialogue of accurate and natural schoolyard swearing--and that's what the kids really love: to have their secret language exposed, to show their naive parents how "good" children really talk: "Stick it where the sun never shines!"

What children also love (and the only way to see this movie is surrounded by a noisy crowd of neighborhood rowdies--avoid art-houses) is that the Bears are such incorrigibles and total foul balls--Jerry Lewis, Lou Costello, the Three Stooges at every base, without the bothersome (adult world) intrusion of Dean Martin and Bud Abbott. They are all smartasses, they all talk back, some of them pick their noses, some flip their middle fingers with abandon, but none of them can catch or hit a baseball.

To see the Bears "come through" is a communal thrill. It's the championship game. When Alfred Lutter, the bespectacled quiz kid intellectual from ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE, walks on four pitches, he and we beam happily. When diminutive, tomato-cheeked Jose, a three foot papoose, also walks, we begin to hope for victory. And then Lupes, a dwarfish, blonde goy nightmare, a blankethead with boogers swimming in his nostrils, races back, back, back in the outfield and makes a magnificent over-the-fence catch, he blinks in unbelieving shock--actor and character, illusion and reality, swirl together. His teammates applaud wildly and so do we. It's a silly moment yet almost moves us to quick tears. For those comparing baseball movie to baseball movie, the effect is achieved without need of the slow motion balletic orchestration of "the last catch" by Robert DeNiro's cancer-ridden catcher in John Hancock's BANG THE DRUM SLOWLY.

Obviously this material is delicate in its sentiments; a rain cloud of bleeding-heart liberalism hovers about, threatening to dilute the anarchic joy. For a while, all goes well. When Amanda (Tatum O'Neal) joins the team as a fierce strike-out pitcher, Bill Lancaster avoids the scenario preachments about the need for equal opportunity in Little League. To watch Tatum toss that hardball, to see how she brings solidarity and leadership and purpose to the team is proof enough that little girls must play alongside little boys in our neighborhood leagues. And that the Bears include blacks and chicanos on their roster, while the enemy teams are notably all-WASP and all-male, makes the point. In fact, director Michael Ritchie has given us for heroes and heroines the perfect microcosm of the disenfranchised: poor blacks and third world, a female, several upstart working class white kids, and some alienated upper middle class intellectuals--that is the Bears' opening lineup for the revolution!

Unfortunately, the urge to switch from upsurge to liberal message gets too strong. The pitcher for the Athletics disobeys orders from the coach, his father (Vic Morrow), so papa comes out on the field and slaps his kid. THE BAD NEWS BEARS takes a seventh inning stretch while the boy allows Bear runs to score unheeded, tosses the now defiled baseball at his father's feet, and walks off the field with his mother's arm around his shoulder.

The moral: adults ruin children's fun by insisting that winning is everything. The idea is a correct one, but the setup is damned contrived. Besides, the scene is sexist--Father is macho, warlike, but Mother is peaceful, non-competitive, non-violent, a regular Mary. Besides, the scene is a lie. Screwed-up values or not, no young boy has ever allowed his mother to place her arm around him before his teammates in the history of Little League. Check the record books.

Luckily THE BAD NEWS BEARS recovers its momentum and catchy spirit for the finale. To explain exactly what happens is unfair to those who haven't seen it. Suffice it to say, the Bears lose AND win, and win big. Thumbing their nose at good sportsmanship and WASP manners, these heterogeneous little kids dance around the field, pouring beer on their heads as if they had just swept four in a row at Yankee Stadium.

Like the eruption of the schoolchildren in Jean Vigo's immortal 1930 ZERO DE CONDUITE, here is a spontaneous dance of life. It is anarchy under the stolid American flag--an ironic patriotic presence which dominates Michael Ritchie's parting shot. It is almost enough to make an old stone-face like Walter Matthau let slip a creaky smile and mutter "Mazel Tov." ■

The Last Word

Looking Back

Although we're "a review of contemporary cinema," we're excited to present material on the Film and Photo League in this issue. Except for a few scattered articles and Tom Brandon's tours around the country with programs of League films, this courageous moment in radical American filmmaking has remained little-known.

The left does have a history, a rich history of determination and struggle against American capitalism. Because bourgeois history, the education system, and the media try to obliterate or distort our history, the responsibility for reclaiming it falls on us. As the recent mass popularity of ROOTS shows, there is a genuine hunger for the real history of people fighting for control of their lives. But official bourgeois history has nothing to offer people, as the mass apathy to the Bicentennial hoopla demonstrated. Radical history offers a vibrant alternative, and the recent surge of interest in women's history and labor history has resulted in some fine films such as UNION MAIDS and HARLAN COUNTY, USA.

While the League's experiences have natural historical interest, they are even more important for the lessons we can draw from them. The men and women involved in the League faced a situation similar to the one faced by radical filmmakers today: creating and distributing revolutionary films within the context of US capitalism. The history of the League shows what can be done with very limited human and material resources. We can also see the importance of close contact between filmmakers and critics on the one hand and actual political action on the streets and in the workplaces.

The League's history also helps us understand the relations of filmmaking, political action, and political organization. Through its coordinating role in the League, the Communist Party provided a situation in which filmmakers, writers, teachers, and other artists could relate to political struggle. The party brought members, fellow travellers, and working people together in an energizing way. At its best, the party helped each different group contribute to and reinforce the other.

We cannot separate the Film and Photo League from the history of the Communist Party in the Thirties--its accomplishments as well as its failures. There are negative lessons, as well as positive ones, to be learned. For example, the CP's extreme policy changes confused many people, particularly when these changes seemed to have little to do with US conditions. During the party's "Third Period" (1927-35), the CP swerved sharply left. Social democrats and other reformers were attacked as no different than the fascists. Abruptly, the party then entered the Popular Front period in which it worked with any elements, including the bourgeoisie, to build a lowest common denominator fight against fascism. Abruptly again, in 1939, with the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact, the party shifted again, disillusioning many members and followers in the process. The CP's slavish adherence to every shift of Soviet foreign policy reduced its effectiveness in the US. Similarly, while the CP was often in the lead of anti-racist struggle, it often failed to organize well in the black community or even abandoned grass roots work when policy shifted. The obvious lesson is that proletarian internationalism is not always best served by hitching your wagon to some other red's star.

Many times the CP's organizing work amounted to little more than militantly standing for immediate demands: socialism was put on the back burner. (This mistake is repeated in the film UNION MAIDS which totally ignores the close relation of the women depicted to the CP.) While in one short editorial we can't thoroughly analyze something as complex as the CP in the Thirties, that evaluation and critique is now being done by left historians and critics. Sometimes it is too uncritical and romantic. Sometimes it is too dogmatic or insensitive to historical realities. But the important point is this: we can neither fully understand nor critically evaluate the Film and Photo League (or for that matter any other part of the left-leaning filmmaking and and criticism of the Thirties, such as Vidor's DAILY BREAD, Ford's GRAPES OF WRATH, and the magazines Experimental Cinema and Film Front) unless we understand it in the larger political context of the realities and options of the times. We hope that printing this material will stimulate interest in further examination of the dialectical relation of the League to the CP and the League to the larger political realities of the Thirties.

Similarly, today we can't understand and evaluate new political films unless we have a sense of the political movement and options around us. Actually, this goes for all film--avant-garde as well as Hollywood. Unlike bourgeois aestheticism, left film work is inseparable from a political analysis of the world we live in and participation in its struggles.

John Hess
Chuck Kleinhans

NEWS AND NOTES

The Education Film Library Association's 19th Annual American Film Festival will be at the New York Hilton May 23-28. It's the Cannes of educational and documentary film festivals. Last year they showed many important political films, such as WAITING FOR FIDEL, WOMAN TO WOMAN, THE BRICKMAKERS, and LOVEJOY'S NUCLEAR WAR.

The Film Studies Association of Canada will meet at McGill U. in Montreal May 17-19. There will be continuous film screenings and presentations on various topics. For info write Seth Feldman, English, U. of Western Ontario, London, Ont., Canada or Marianne Lafon, Film and Communication, McGill U., Montreal, P.Q., Canada.

The National Film Information Service offers access by mail to the research holdings of the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. For info write to Anthony Slide, the NFIS, 8949 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA, 90211.

American Folklore Films, and Videotapes: An Index locates over 1,800 16mm films and videotapes about the entire spectrum of the American folk tradition. (Center for Southern Folklore, P.O. Box 4081, 1216 Peabody Av., Memphis, TN, 38104, 350 pp., $15.00.)

Epic West has tapes for sale from its Summer Institute for Social-Cultural Studies. The areas include Marxist aesthetics, feminism, Marxist history, and anthropology. Write 2640 College Av., Berkeley, CA 94704, for a brochure.

"WHO? Suspected Criminals, Rioters, Demonstrators, Crowds." This is the come-on for an Eastman Kodak Company pamphlet, Photographic Surveillance Techniques for Law Enforcement Agencies ($1.00). This choice document routinizes corporate exploitation of misery. Which Kodak film and which Kodak camera will capture "the suspected person" most successfully? Acute or even mild sufferers from paranoia are not encouraged to put this pamphlet on their reading list. Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, NY, 14605.